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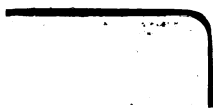
RIVERSIDE ~~~~~
~~~~~ PAPERS

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JOHN DEVENISH HOPPUS



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# RIVERSIDE PAPERS.

BY

JOHN DEVENISH HOPPUS.

Soul, full-rigged, and well-equipped,  
Speeding down the 'Measured Mile,'  
Freight of Wisdom, yet unshipped,  
Waiting issue of the Trial;  
Think you this your only cruise,  
One short stretch of river-tide?  
Think you then to sink and lose  
Name and Port upon your side,  
Gulphed where Time's black mud-banks lie,  
Lost for ever in their fold?  
Or, completed, back to hie;  
Then, with this world's freighted hold,  
Grand state-cabin, white and gold,  
Fit for Him we 'Master' call,  
Will you not, full stately-tall,  
Sweep the All-immortal Sea,  
Tropics of Eternity?

J. D. H.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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## CONTENTS OF VOLUME II.

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|                                     | PAGE |
|-------------------------------------|------|
| A DAY OF SEARCH ON WHAT-CALL-HILL . | I    |
| SHEPHERD BEN . . . . .              | 42   |
| MY FRIEND WITH THE FRILL . . .      | 166  |
| THE NEAR-SIDE PASSENGER . . .       | 192  |
| A CHRISTMAS-EVE IN TUMBRIL-TOWN .   | 209  |
| OPEN AIR IN TOWN . . . . .          | 244  |
| THE UNBIDDEN GUEST . . . . .        | 251  |



JOHN DEVENISH HOPPUS.

Ob. 21 Aug. 1879. Æt. 29.

# RIVERSIDE PAPERS.



## VI.

### A DAY OF SEARCH ON WHAT-CALL-HILL.

To an artist, perhaps the sweetest of all sweet country-walks is the one in which he goes to choose him a place for some new picture; setting out with a feeling of discovery, and of the unconventional; treading slowly and daintily, for fear of missing something; finding out fresh variety in the old as well as in the new phases of landscape—beauty that he has not noticed before, and which he is tempted therefore to think can hardly have existed until *his* eyes succeeded in observing the new loveliness. For is it

not *his* province, above that of other men, to recognise the effects which nature obtains in her living forms and colours? He thinks his eyes are very wide open to-day. He does not keep to the footpath at all, but (like that peripatetic in the Book of Job) goes to and fro in the earth, and walks up and down in it—now thinking he has sighted a place from which he can get a picture—now walking on—now stepping back a pace or two, or turning a little, and pushing brake and bramble aside, to get up on some rising bank, but still keeping the especial view in his mind. Then watching for awhile the desired landscape—until, with a half sigh, he feels that in proportion as it is beautiful, so is it unpaintable—he reluctantly gives it up, with eyes dim and dazzled with Nature's prolific fruits, and turns away—to be made aware, by the too-suggestive brambles, of the thin covering to his legs, as he gets him back discreetly and warily, for the moment forgetful of his higher object in the more material consideration of his shins.

Whether it be when the pale spring-blossoms are eddying about like butterflies ; or when the white midsummer gossamers are floating through the air, and catching upon the 'hedgerows ; or when the deeper-coloured autumn-leaves are rustling along the ground, and curling up that they may form a home for houseless and naked winter-grubs —whichever be the month, and whatever be the effect the artist looks for, the very plucking of the nosegay that is to bloom—so he hopes—for a life-time, upon canvas—is a pleasure.

But would not many a new landscape be begun under better auspices, if more time were spent in quiet contemplation ? Not of that vista merely, which is to appear upon his canvas, but of surroundings which at first sight would seem unimportant to the careless, and which may never come into the picture at all, but which will influence it throughout ? Over and above those subordinate accessories which so materially contribute to the success of the picture, the

central idea, which should pervade the whole, will thus be brought out more prominently and depicted more truthfully. In the "still life" that he would portray, the artist will see Nature basking ; but as he watches, he will see her start, and turn and twitch in her noon-tide sleep ; and if he be willing to bend down very close, he will be made such a partaker of her dreams, that although she may not be able, desire as she may, to interpret them to him, he shall at least succeed in making some delicate curves of her beautiful face reappear on his canvas, so that his picture of "Still Life," shall be "life" indeed, and though "still," yet not dead. For a landscape to possess the living interest, the *story*, it is not always necessary to introduce the smock and gaiters, which represent the clothes-beswaddled fellow-man. Without this visual presence, the unspoken tale of the picture may be told as forcibly, and often more forcibly. May not that pair of old leathern gauntlets, and the gleaming bill-hook, peeping from out the heap of topped brushwood,

suggest in the woodland scene that same smock and gaiters, which have moved off some where in the shade to enjoy their mid-day rest? Do we not seem to see the blue wreath of smoke curling out of the woodman's unseen pipe, from behind the broad oak that is fixing gnarled fingers into the leafy doublet of the ground? And mingling with the forest smell do we not get the delicious odour of the coarse tobacco? Here is "still life," but we can hear its heart beating. The glove of one we care for is able to bring to our recollection, not the fair hand alone, but all the lovely lines of face and head.

These thoughts may be true, but are they an excuse for our laziness this hot morning, as we lie upon the hill, languidly watching all that is going on in the village beneath us, and far away over miles of wood and corn and pasture-land in those other parishes and shires? Surely these can never come into the little bit of distance, which we are painting from that peep in the wood

above us. That sorry piece of white canvas, on which the more we paint, the more the sky won't come, stipple as we may.

But now, stretched out upon the breezy down, we would forget our foreboding sky, in the light that is around, and the life that is beneath us. And do we not, although against all reason, comfort ourselves with the thought that we have walked many miles with one paintbrush in our hand, and another in our mouth? Ah! there below in that meadow which the villagers call "Parson's Pleasure," is our fellow-artist, who is putting up at the "Plough." So he is not at work either this languid morning, though to-night he will try to persuade us that he has got "writer's cramp." He looks from here like some erudite brown woolly bear, lying in the grass, reading off a book propped up in front of him, but which by its whiteness suggests that no characters are printed on the page. Three days has that grub been studying that same page; and three days have his thoughts, like ours, been

up in the clouds. There, in that paddock near to him, is another grub; but he is evidently at work, for he is standing erect, as if he were smelling and sniffing about, preparatory to crawling into that brown beehive, which is the village round-house, inhabited only by drunken drones, and that against their will. This industrious grub is, we can see now, signalling to a little white butterfly which is drawing a long withered blade of grass behind it. Ah, that is his wife who is dragging a brown stair-carpet across the paddock for her husband to beat with a stick, which we mistook for some strange antenna, as he waved to her with it.

A wonderful place is this What-Call-Hill; an inland bluff, raising up his huge broad shoulders so suddenly from the village beneath, that it is all the little ones can do to climb to the top of him without taking a half-way rest upon his knees. So big and broad is he, as he stretches out and hangs his long arms upon the top of his high-



backed settle, that every forenoon, two hours before lunch, his shadow begins to start upon its wide round, crawling slowly along at first down the village street, and then going quicker over the long white wooden bridge, until it comes to the toll-house in the centre, and then creeping through the pike and flitting on apace—so quickly and quietly that the unconscious toll-collector does not come out to see who it may be, or to claim his due. Then, at the other end of the bridge, it stands still for half-an-hour, as if in doubt whether or no to go up the street of the twin-village. But then the old man seems to stretch and turn somewhat in his afternoon siesta; and so the shadow goes on again, this time creeping slowly up among the cottages, making the women come out and stand at their doors for a minute, though they don't exactly know why. But the shadow has farther to go yet, so it creeps on more slowly still over the last gable, and then out upon the uplands behind, opening and spreading

like some cooling fan ; and then past copse and cover and clumps of solitary firs, it mounts to the top of the downs, and creeps out of sight altogether, lost in the greater shadow that has overshadowed all.

Other people's businesses can well be minded from the top of What-Call-Hill, as well as their lands and belongings. What-Call-Hill is a many-volumed novel, which is always interesting, though it is never-ending, and its plots and counterplots are complicated and extensive enough for a whole library full of fiction.

Any day that we climb up, and sit, and look over the twin-villages, and the pleasant lands leading far away from them into other shires, we can rest and listen to some new chapter that is always ready-written for us, always full of some new description and poetry, often of incident and adventure, and sometimes of mishap and tragedy. This morning, a thousand things are going on below us—a thousand schemes and devices of man are all in work at once. Why, in

the many farms alone, we can see, in one or other, every agricultural occupation for the month, in busy progress—a complete August Calendar. Nearly everywhere harvesting is at its height. Upon that hot bright upland, the thirsty men are busy with sickle and stone-jar; and just below them, those two fields of shining oats and sable beans, standing stooked in sheaves, look afar off like a draught-board, with the men arranged in row, ready for battle.

Over there, on the other hill, where they were fagging the wheat a fortnight ago, is now a herd of roystering, rooting swine, roaming in long black phalanx over the golden stubble, grubbing for the scattered grain. Then, down in the valley, nearer to us, upon the Bole-Burrow Farm, we can recognise the slovenly monoptic, Samuel Skindle, at work among his men in that three-cornered field of beans—lazily pulling up the haulm, instead of cutting it with the sickle, because Mr. Skindle allowed the summer-weeds to grow too high, while he

was doing something else badly. He will not get much fodder out of that for his already half-starved-looking cattle. But perhaps we are prejudiced; for did we not, last year, when he caught us in his orchard, taking a sketch of a consumptive and spavined horse, for our (still unfinished) picture, "The Marriage of Hunger and Thirst,"—did we not then utterly fail to convince him that we were not in the employ of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals? And does he not, to this day, view us with one-eyed mistrust, remembering ever those six-barred gaping and yawning ribs which he saw us marking in so boldly, and which he informed us, focussing his stern and single critic's eye, "was not drawed correct?"

But there, rolling slowly through the open gate, is Phineas, his obese and good-natured, wooden-headed, wooden-legged brother, who seems to be floundering rather awkwardly through the dry and crumbling soil, which sinks beneath the artificial limb,

wherewith (so the village-wags say) he drills his brother's turnips "since the drill-barrow bust up." In the field coming down to the river tow-path, just opposite us, the wheat-stubble is undergoing its winter-ploughing, and the dark chestnut "four-in-hand," as they slowly drag that clumsy and struggling old-fashioned Walloon plough after them, do not look at all like the "four-in-hand" which we saw a month ago rattling up Piccadilly. But what is that boy doing, who is following behind, bending down every now and then, like a little page bowing behind some agricultural chancellor of the exchequer? Why, it is our landlord's little son, who was to have a holiday from school to-day, to go and find some worms, for we are expecting a friend down from town to-morrow, to try that deep "Skaynes Hole" for barbel.

There is our industrious and ingenious youth picking them up out of the furrows at the plough-tail. Where does he put them though? We can see no red flower-

pot, or other distinguishable receptacle. Has he contracted the habit of that nasty one in the story, and does he, too, make a bait-box of his mouth? We must interrogate him seriously upon the subject to-night.

In the next field they are trimming the hedges. It is late for such work, but Bill Cropper is a sporting-farmer, who holds that before all things it is necessary to preserve game; and who, we are persuaded, would cheerfully sleep on the settle all the rest of the breeding season, if partridges frequented feather-beds (we mean, before they were plucked), rather than disturb the birds.

Surely here is a "Mirroure" of the "Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry," as set forth by the revered old Thomas Tusser, gentleman, chorister, courtier, farmer, poet, who, so long past any need for sympathy, wins it from us still, when we think upon the perplexities and thriftlessness of his unlucky life. Poor Tusser! Like Goldsmith,

and a heap of other lovable men, whose office seemed indeed,

“To sharpen others with advice of wit,  
When they themselves are, like the whetstone,  
blunt.”

But this mirror of What-Call-Hill is more than even good Master Thomas gives us; for here is to be seen water-husbandry going on as well, if we may be permitted the term. For, winding along between the rich ripe lands and happy hamlets, the river flows, gleaming now with the light upon it, like some curving arm lying cushioned upon the meads, with, far away to the south, its outstretched finger pointing in sleepy indecision to blue distance in the horizon. Twice is this fair arm spanned by bracelets. Here, at our feet, it is clasped by an agate band, whose opaqueness is interrupted by variety of colour and design, as we watch those brindled cows with their brown herds-men crossing from the other village. Then, a mile lower down, under the woods, is another clasp of blood-red cornelian; and

eight times farther still, a sky-blue water-sapphire ring just peeps out upon the far-off finger. That ring is the pride of Water-Stokeley, but like many another valuable, is thought too good to be made use of every day.

How tempting this hot morning do those amphibious-looking men appear, who are cutting the rushes, up to their waists in the water. The millers, who look like clowns who have left their red paint at home, are watching and envying them also. How they are splashing about and laughing, as they heave up the dripping bundles to William, the landlord of the Ferry at Otterford. He has bought the bed of the miller, and has come up this morning to begin cutting. These water-husbandmen are as thirsty as their upland neighbours. Three times this half-hour have those men come up to the punt-side, and three times have they received from the hands of the liberal William a jar, which they raised, looking to us up here as if they were taking a close



inspection of his generous physiognomy through some new-fashioned telescope. We wish *we* could have a peep through the new telescope !

But see—there is a boat gliding along up-stream, under the opposite bank, full of ladies that look like a crate of half-grown cygnets packed in tight, and being towed along by another creature on the bank, who does not look at all like a cygnet, though probably he has a better temper than that mild-eyed impostor. Now the rush-cutters have stopped and turned to look, and William, a green bundle in his left arm, trails it with him to the opposite side of the punt, and raises his hat to the crate of cygnets, and the cygnets all look one way, and we can hear voices. But we do not understand swan-songs, although as we hear their musical notes borne up, we feel persuaded that they are not just going to die. And now the Patient One has lifted his downcast head and hands, like some old broken-backed saint at prayers, but a minute

or two later we hear the gentle sound of "Lock, lock, lock!" in triple repetition, floated up to us, and then again, "Lock, lock, lock," but very small this time, as it creeps up into the wood behind. Ah! now we can see it has fetched out old Bill Trinder, the lock-keeper. There he is, emerging from the little white wooden shanty, which is lock-house and miniature shoe-maker's shop all in one. Bill is raising his hand to his head as if saluting. Now he runs up to the top-gates, and now we hear a rattle, and now he runs down to the bottom gates, and a few minutes after, we see the near gate slowly swing open, and then close again, and there is the Patient One talking to the cygnets. Now they have all risen into view again, and Trinder puts his back against the great white swing beam—that beam, in a hole of which we found last year, cunningly concealed, a swallow's nest—a nest from which were hatched a couple of broods, too, although the poor eggs must have been bumped

about in very rough manner every time a boat went through. But under the guardianship of the kindly Trinder, who used to replace the naked young birds when they fell out of the nests, two broods managed to spend a very happy babyhood. This year, however, the parent birds have forgotten the delicate grass and soft lining of feathers which still await them, if they could but find the old place again.

Trinder is the kindest man, holding the most devilish creed, that we ever met. He is a paradox. As we sit talking to him by the hour together, every time he draws out his wax-ends he displays the widest sympathies. And yet is there not up there—on the desk in which he keeps his lock-dues and tickets, and instructions for boarding boats that have illegal nets or under-sized fish in them—is there not a heap of so-called religious literature, which he tells us is his comfort and consolation by day and night? Here he keeps his “Sips for Sinners,” his “Sighs from Hell,” his “Hangings, Draw-

ings and Quarterings" of Devils, ancient and modern, in three octavo volumes; his "Relations of Fearful Estates," and "Deathbeds of the Damned." His only human book is a pictorial edition of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," which he is taking in in parts, of a travelling pedlar who calls once in three months. Here, too, are religious periodicals, in whose advertisements every situation, from a miller to a maid-of-all-work, is to be obtained, provided only that the applicant hails from a place of truths, and is a member of a "Particular" Cause. Moreover, Bill has tracts and treatises without number upon "Divine Enlargement," and the "Doctrine of Everlasting Damnation," over which he pores, when work is done, and Nature is shedding her softest lights on all men.

Trinder thinks that though, for this world, "there's nothing like leather," yet for the world to come, "there's nothing like water"—he being a Baptist. This aqueous creed he declares aloud every alter-

nate Sunday in the little chapel at Dalton-on-the-Hill, six miles off. Here he holds forth the doctrines which he has been poring over at odd times during the week, telling those assembled to hear him, that the road to destruction is broad, "an' doan't wear yer boots out ;" but that the way to heaven is narrow, nasty in places, and to be accomplished only by water, water, water ! "Blessed Baptism," exclaims Bill, fervidly, "I only wishes I could be baptised every day !" He ever bewails that so suitable a baptistry as the lock-pound, and so convenient a vestry as his shanty cannot be turned to account. Indeed, when once his impious son had outraged the views of his parent more grievously than usual, by speaking in a disrespectful manner of the "goings on" of one of the "daughters in the Lord," we heard Bill Trinder say (evidently even in his anger still solicitous for his son's future safety), "Yer wants a good dowsing in the lock-pound, yer mutton-headed idiot, that's what yer does !"

Poor old Trindler! One could not find a kindlier, less selfish, more childlike creature in the village. Three times a-day do we see him hurrying up the street, catching a few spare minutes that he may feed his blind and paralyzed wife, who can do nothing for herself. And as we return home in the evening we hear his rough but joyful notes, as he sings a martial hymn beside her bed.

But the cygnets have come down the backwater in their boat, which looks here as if it were running straight into the hill. Ah! they have landed—now they are on the garden lawn of the Swan Inn by the bridge. As the ladies stand in a circle, their dresses look like the pale petals of some full-blown rose, arranged round the darker coloured stamens, made up by the Patient One, (who has towed them up), and Randal, the healthy, hearty landlord of the riverside hotel. Randal is the merriest, best-natured man in the county, full of story and joke. See, now, he is evidently displaying some of his rugged humour, for

every now and then we can see the petals opening and then closing up again, as if they felt the air of some laughing wind. The landlord's full name is Randal Cloudesley, but no one ever thinks of calling him anything but Randal—indeed we are not sure that he has not forgotten his other name; we have seen him sign more than one receipt and way-bill, but we never knew him to put any other. From the licensing magistrates, down to the youngest farm-boy who ever called for his mug of beer, he is always addressed as “Randal.” Rarely is a finer specimen of a sturdy, stubborn-principled, kind-hearted man to be met with; he always speaks to the women-folk as, “my good lady,” and prefixes, “Lord love ye,” to most of his assertions. There are his two fishing-punts, and his five boats in row, with the names of his five fair-haired children painted in the stern of each—done, as he told us, “last licence-time, by one o’ they tramp-chaps as come along the road ’ard up; an’ so I sett’n to work to

paint my young uns' names on they back-rails, just to find out a job for the poor chap." A gallant, courteous host is he, who presents every lady who lands there with one of his roses ; they grow all round the pretty house, half covering the side towards the river, and like his own cheerful good nature, are never out of season. There, sitting in an old punt that is drawn up on the grass, is Patience, his eldest, rosy-cheeked daughter, who last Sunday in church sent her little brother across to us with an old family prayer-book, nearly as big as the one out of which prayers were being read. For we had forgotten to put up ours with the palette and tooth-brushes when we left town.

Now lunch is ready, and a wind has blown all the petals away from the two stamens ; and Randal has turned his broad back on the lock, and is standing with his legs wide open, and pointing up here, and the Patient One is shading his eyes. Probably he is being told that "that good



gentleman up there, on top as you sees, is lodging across the water, over at Woodley's, behind the church, and is one of they artists what comes down from town every year, and draws all the pretty bits about, as takes their fancy."

And now the Patient One also has gone to lunch in that pretty room, wherein is the most wonderful piano ever beheld or played upon, whose five octaves and a note or two over give much satisfaction to the willingly-pleased summer-visitors, and to Patience all through the drearier winter months, when the visitors are gone. Last summer, some artists introduced the song of the "Mermaid" to the piano, the nightly choral introduction being greatly appreciated by the rustics, who used to be dimly seen in the darkness, sitting outside and listening. The night we arrived this year, we were walking over the bridge, thinking of our friends, who had sent the "jolly sailor-boys up, up aloft," and laid the "land-lubbers down below, below, below" (and kept them

there for ten long months)—and wishing they were with us now to “pipe all hands” again. Suddenly, as if in realisation of our wish, we heard the same festive strains, and turning off the bridge, and past the house, on to the lawn, found—not our friends Kamil Hare, and Mawlprop and Easle, but Patience and her young brothers, chorusing and beating time with their feet, while *we* played the rustic in the darkness, and listened, and appreciated.

But there are other objects in that pretty room—there are the high-backed oak chairs, which Randal bought at the sale, over at Badcot Bridge, when the Hall was wrecked by the bailiffs, and the descendants of those who had once received King Charles the Second there, had to turn out for a Birmingham button manufacturer. He hung a Turner upside down in one of those very rooms, and to this day he goes unpunished, even by the insulted painter’s ghost.

There, also, is the large framed photograph of the wedding party up at the Great House

in the village, taken as they appeared last Valentine's Day, just before the breakfast; the bride and her good man in the centre, with the parsons commanding the flanks, and the six groomsmen looking hungry and morose, and the six bridesmaids looking as if they didn't know whether to laugh or to cry—and very pretty. And all around that group are other views in compartments, of the fronts and rears of all the festoons and triumphal arches and mottoes, and all so gay, that one would not recognise the village street if one did not see Randal's burly form, and his five fair-haired children, peeping one behind the other, and the two inebriated policemen, with their helmets on one side, looking happy and unofficial, and a little host of villagers, all known to us, and all looking as if they wanted to be taken, but didn't know how to contrive it. One would have thought that the bride had been the bitterest enemy of those policemen, by the way in which they forgave her that day—drinking her health seventy times seven, and

- then being willing freely to do it again. But this is too beer-thirsty a subject to be dwelt on up here this hot morning—yet our thoughts will return in some form or other, and we feel thirsty again, as we think of Patience, who is bringing the Patient One his well-earned drink from that old flagon with the swans' necks for handles. And there in the cupboard are the cream jugs and sauceboats, which are all swans done in white porcelain, and the salt-cellars, which are grey-feathered cygnets.
- 

What a good old yeoman stock Randal comes from! The family has farmed, or grazed, or done something, somewhere or other in the county, for these last two hundred years. Randal can tell legends of his great-grandfather; he can tell tales of the country-side, and of country folk, by the night long; stories, that would fascinate the character-seeking novelist, and whose rugged humour and pathos would delight the poet for all time. Shall we ever forget the recountal of his one poaching episode—

"thirty year an' more ago;" and how it grieved the old man, Randal's father, and how he then swore to him, that "he'd never no more poach wheres he couldn't shoot," and he "kept by his word like a man?" Then there was the tale of the Revel, and what came of it, "as he 'ad it when a child from his gran'-fayther, as he lay a-dyin'." And the ghost tale of the "Phantom Hay Barge," which Randal "didn't want the good gentlemen to b'lieve against theirselves." And the tale of his great-uncle, whom he remembered "when he were *so* high—quite a bit of a thing—standin' up in the tap, an' a takin' the bet about carryin' three bushel o' grains on his back up What-Call-Hill;" and how "the strong ole dog did it, an' then when he got on top, laid 'n down, an' next mornin' the warrener found him there, a-lyin' beside the sack, an' a-hugglin' up to it, with a smile, pleased and stubborn-like on his face, as 'ow he warnt goin' to be done; an' 'ow he wouldn't move, an' so they had to come an' make him. An' yer can see, good gentlemen,

any day, where they laid 'n, up along o' Bess an' Jonathan, in the churchyard over at Maulworth, behind the hills."

We have listened day out and in, while he talked of that quaint birth-place of the Maulworth giants, and of the yew tree in the grave-yard of the Norman Church—which we are prepared, with Randal, to swear is "the biggest in England." "Not but what there *be* big uns about in different parts, as folks 'll tell you is biggerer, but then this is *the* biggest, fo' all that." And did not we ourselves hear the Maulworth parson, who knows all about old things, say that it was a great tree when the Conqueror landed? And did we not hear him, speaking one Sunday evening last year, in a sermon upon the Good Samaritan—so simply uttered, yet so full of thought and feeling—say that this little village had had the same name of Maulworth for hundreds of years, ever since a government-survey that was made nearly all over England a very long while ago, by people who came round, just as that summer

the engineers had come round, putting up little wands with pieces of paper stuck through them, and planted in such odd places, and which the village boys had been warned not to touch. And how afterwards the survey was written out in a big book, called the Domesday Survey ; and how little Maulworth was put in as well, as belonging to Roger de Somebody or other, and was worth £14 a year. The boys who had been told not to touch, were very still in the old church, that evening ; and the women who sat with their arms crossed herring-bone fashion, did not have to tweak up their snoring husbands as usual.

After that, when we went up to see the Maulworth Giants, we saw the seven huge tombs of a family that had built a castle, and done doughty deeds hard by—as the old woman told us, “a long while afore her time.” For the castle had gone to ruin, and out of its ruins a farm had been built ; and then that farm in turn crumbled away, and now these modern bright red gables that

have no moss upon them yet, are all which marks the soon-to-be-forgotten site. The family has been extinct five hundred years; but, turned to stone, they still preserve in the sacred church, in spite of Puritan halberts, some of the history of their noble house, which has crumbled away in the ages. Even the characteristics of four of those valiant scions are yet retained in the names that the ancient villagers have handed down to their children of to-day. Here they are: Jack Long, Jack Strong, Jack Ever-afeared, and Jack Never-afeared. Four mighty men, who, if not giants, were yet greatly above the average stature of mortals—for did not the irreverent mason, who himself had a head as big as a twelve-pound lard-bladder, tell us how, when they opened two of the huge tombs to repair them, he could not get his cap on the skull of Jack Never-afeared, “heave at it as he would, never so.”

But what unwarrantably delightful laziness are we giving way to! Here have we idled away another hour of daylight, dreaming on



top of What-Call-Hill! Surely we must be pixie-led; we have lain so still, that villagers will begin to think as they look up dazzled in the noon-day sun, that we are no man, but a mawkin, blown over on its tattered back by the breeze. But everything tends to laziness this languid day. There is the eternal roar of the lasher as it pours its white water into the tumbling bay, ringing a chime, that will take as many days to accomplish as this flush of water shall last. The tired harvesters have gotten them into the corners of the fields to rest; the horses are no longer before the plough; the rush-cutters are gone, and we can now and again see them on the barge, as it glides slowly down between the eyots at Gate-Hampstead.

For awhile the great loom of Nature seems standing still. How then shall *we* work? 'twould be presumptuous! There is our fellow artist-grub, too; he has at last read himself off to sleep, lying like a long brown caddis, which has just managed to put its stone-coloured head out of its case, and has

dropped off again into hibernation from the effort. Samuel Skindle is not to be seen ; he is probably in-doors, or under some shady tree, with a red pocket-handkerchief over his single eye. Nor is the obese Phineas to the fore ; he no doubt is dreaming that he is prodding with his wooden leg at village wags, who, just out of range, keep up an aggravating enquiry as to “when he’s a-goin’ to drill they turmuts ?”

Even those indefatigable ladies at the Great House in the village, who have been practising archery all the morning, have gone in at last at the summons of the great bell, which tells everyone in the village, and a good many out of it, when they sit down to their meal. They must have been practising for some county Toxophilite meeting to have worked so hard on such a hot day ; and the younger one, in the salmon-coloured print dress, will have to practise a long while, if she always has to walk thirty yards or so round each target to pick up her arrows. The older and more artful one

makes her head, or rather her eye, save her heels, for she contrives that most of hers shall tell upon the straw; but then she has lived longer in the world, and has had greater experience in every sort of match of convenience. What prize, we wonder, is she while at lunch exhorting the salmon-coloured maiden to strive to obtain? Will her young niece, like her adviser, make "the best number of hits;" or will she, like her sister last S. Valentine's Day, "get the best gold?" or, like her own self, make one true "centre" of some daisy which shall remain a living, loving mark, when all the targets are cleared from off the face of the lawn? But all this time our canvas is in the wood, with little more upon it than we saw this morning in bed on our ceiling—to wit, flies. And our brushes are lying beside us, dry as we are; and the tired bees, who have made a mistake in coming up here, miss the flowery land they have left—where many a little painted sign-board hangs out, and swings to-and-fro in the wind, inviting them at every

turn to stop and taste from the cool cellars of the "Rose and Thistle," or the "Prince of Wales' Feathers," or the "Wall-Flowers," or the "Blue Bell," or to step into the delicate crimson-walled parlour of the "Dragon," and many another hostelry, wherein is brewed the best of liquors for thirsty bees.

But some of the men have begun cutting again; already we can see the beginning of fresh wind-rows curving over the changing fields. And Randal has come out of his wattled porch, and has crossed over to the barn. We can just see two legs and a piece of back, as he leans over the half-door of the wooden out-building, where he stores his boats in winter; that half-door on which are marked up dates of past floods—when the river rose over the lawn, and he had to clay up the tap-room door; and dates of past thunder-storms, that swamped the place for a short time, and made the river turbid and white with the chalk that ran off What-Call-Hill, into the village

street—down which you could have come to grief at six miles an hour in a punt. And on that door is a wonderful double-curved line, done in blue paint, and with a date of month and year under it, which Randal most unsatisfactorily and vaguely explains, by saying that “it was drawered, as he see it, seven year ago, an’ is a double rainbow, like as appeared up agen’ the woods a’top o’ What-Call-Hill, ten minutes a’fore his missus had her first child, an’ lay a-sayin’ as o’w he’d be born dead. But he warn’t, an’ let ’im bide till his bones be set, he’ll be stouter, stronger-like, nor never his fayther was.” We remember talking to him about it last year, and then turning the conversation to his guests, and asking if he’d ever had any literary gentleman staying with him. Randal went off suddenly, and re-appeared with a newspaper cutting, which contained a little anonymous notice of an episode on a bridge, and a sketch of one or two village characters, which he said “someone or

'tother had sent to him down from London, some one as must 'ave been on the bridge at the time, but he couldn't guess who." And then he refolded the paper, and said, with broad, beaming face, "It's like the folks talks hereabouts just, ain't it, good gentleman?" And then, with a glowing laugh, and a wave of his brown hand, "an' can't yer see the ole place, 'as yer reads it? Why, he's put in they words in the summer-house, as I'd a missed noticin' myself, though they must ha' been there a-many years. An' to think o' putt'n in our little Minnie, an' this ole 'at I wears, an' Splash, an' all! I'll have a pipe an' a glass for 'im as did it, next time he comes, if I knows 'im."

Then the genial Randal stood still for some seconds in reflective doubt, and at last said, "No, 't warn't neither o' they two poets as we 'ad, different times, stayin' two year ago; they warn't lively enough, though they was both good nice gentlemen, but they was both feeble-like. They both 'ad their breathin' bags out o' order—a suthin

'ere as didn't work proper ;" and Randal hit his broad and unmistakeably sound chest a blow which almost made the ground shake beneath him. " An' one of 'em didn't fish at all, an' 'tother one fished, an' didn't take nothin', though the water was in most bootiful order for spinnin'. But no wonder they was bad ; they never went to bed, an' they never got up—like ornary folks, I mean. An' I think the night chills made 'em melancholy-like, for they never eat 'earty, all the time they was 'ere."

\* \* \* \*

And now the rose-leaves and the Patient One have just finished lunch, and are crowding round Randal again. What can make us take such an interest in those rose-leaves ? We feel modestly conscious that we are not in the habit of flirting—much ; we generally flirt a little less than we paint—and we paint very little. But, see, Randal is pointing again up here, and they are all looking up too. He will taunt us with our laziness to-night, as we chat over our flagon of cyder,

and what excuse can the most mendacious mawkin—we mean artist, give?

Why should he stare up at us like that, drawing attention, and doubtless derision upon us? We resent it. Why should we be pointed at from a distance, as if we were the fairy-fed, emaciated Berkshire Horse, stretched out in lean length upon the hill side? Never mind! we will defy him, light one more pipe, and survey him with cloudy indifference.

Ah, now they have disappeared, and Randal has gone about his duties, as every industrious and right-minded landlord should do. Yet, though they are gone, we do not feel quite comfortable. What is it? Is it that we feel we are doing here what we did at Otterford—little odd jobs at the canvas, and then long tipples of laziness in between? Doing, in fact, what we reproved in Dobby?

How few men there are, who, if they have the friend by the fire, have not the dun at the door as well, in some form or other?



It is pleasant to be idle and dream like this; but how much of truth is there in the ancient proverb, that too much honey cloyeth the maw? (It dependeth much upon the kind of honey—so we would wish to think up here.)

Nevertheless, we have been looking a long while upon that part of nature which is *not* to re-appear in our picture. We make a resolve. We have dreamed long enough. In ten short minutes, if we are dreaming, it shall be in front of our canvas; for there we have no excuse to idle. In that peep from the wood, there is nothing which might not legitimately go into our picture. No one ever troubles us in that quiet underwood. *There*, there are no bargee-remarks to be listened to; no village-*flâneurs* to regale us with adventure, as at Otterford; no, not even the little governess from the Maisonette to be ferried across. Perhaps she is not there now. We wonder—.

Why, there, in "Parson's Pleasure," the

caddis-grub has crawled forth from his brown case, and has risen, and taken his coat off, to begin a new chapter upon the old page. What can have incited the grub to this undue activity?

But here are the rose-leaves coming up for a dream upon What-Call-Hill. How quaint their bobbing heads look, just appearing above the brow. Now they are come to the last piece that takes the little remaining breath out of most people. And there is the Patient One, carrying the shawls, looking like a shepherd's colley, only not half so nimble. But, why, — we ought to know him! But we mustn't "Cooley," lest we should frighten the rose-leaves away. It is the young lawyer, over from Lustlow-in-Arden, whom we used to dine with sometimes, when we were staying at Otterford! And the rose-leaves are his four sisters; and that smaller, paler rose-leaf, behind the others is — no — yes — why, the little governess from the Maisonette!

## VI.

## SHEPHERD BEN.

## I.

## THE SHEEP WORLD.

SHEPHERD BEN no longer folds his sheep upon the Berkshire Downs.

When old Jabez Lack, the Agricultural Labourers' Union Agent and village-seditionist for Water-Stokeley, told young Ben last Hallowtide that he was a fool for not bettering his position, Ben replied with irritating simplicity, that he was contented where he was. But things have changed since then, and Shepherd Ben no longer listens to the carillon of the many bell-wethers, or scours with his dark and penetrating eye the farthest confines

of the grazing flock, or sends his colley after a straying shearing-ewe, or carries home the sickly gimmer-lamb tucked up within his arm.

He himself is folded now—here, between these six hurdles that lean around this grass-covered mound. There is no headstone, whereby to distinguish this from the many other graves; but more than one stranger, as he passes the churchyard of Water-Stokeley, asks why the hurdles are put up, and is told that it is the grave of “Young Ben the Shepherd, and his mother, the widow Boswell.” It was good to see those hurdles through one of the chancel-windows, on that cold Sunday last April, as the parson read from the altar; “and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd.”

“Young Ben,” as he was called, was not an octogenarian child, described as “Young,” to avoid confusion with some “Old Ben,” the centenarian sire. “Young Ben” died under thirty. Ben was young in years then, but old-fashioned in his ways. He came of

an old stock, his occupation was an ancient one, the Downs over which he trudged were very old and undisturbed.

“My work lays across an’ ole ancient country,” he was wont to say. Of education, that is, of modern schooling, he was entirely destitute. From early youth his occupation had led him among the Downs, and along the Ridgeway, the grey school-houses where hung many a map and chart and diagram.

Ben, the single scholar, could not always follow the Great Teacher’s pointer, yet the display was not altogether meaningless to him, and though to the last he was still at school, yet he had watched and remembered, from day to day, until he had learned many of the subtle sounds and curves of Nature, which metropolitan mortar and the smoke of black-throated factory chimneys have long since obliterated in the training-schools of the manufacturing districts,

Ben’s knowledge was a personal experience of that which our forefathers discovered

when they listened to Nature's symphony, and before they had found the secret of making her bend her fingers to key-boards of man's construction.

Perhaps Ben's chief characteristic was his pure and unalloyed innocence. Whether it were his bringing-up and simple life, or whether, as is more probable, it was his own nature which under any circumstances would most likely have remained unchanged, there the fact remains. It impressed one even at first sight, and oftentimes lent to the simple, uneducated "herd," an unaccountable supremacy, regal rather than rustic, though felt rather than seen. •

One who saw Ben but once in his life, and who was no deep-seer, or "sensitive," no victim of cataleptic craving, or sciomancy, said, "I met a man on the road; I spoke to him, and when we passed, I felt I had left the presence of a leader, a king—yet he was only a rustic, a shepherd."

Is it all too wild a thought—remembering the antiquity and mysterious origin of the

race to which Ben belonged—is it a conjecture too foolish to be entertained, that perhaps Ben, with the grave, peaceful face and almond eyes, “Gipsy Ben,” as some used to call him, had “bred back,” so to speak, and possessed in his Eastern blood, not only the remains of a worn-out race, that languishes through the day of the Nineteenth Century, but a nobler strain of mysterious and sacred grandeur, preserved through all the Christian era, going back to the dim old times of the Seventeenth Dynasty, to the the Hyksos, the Shepherd-kings, of whose race was the Pharoah before whom Joseph stood? And, thinking of those ancient shepherd-warriors, our thoughts pass to those other Pharoahs who built the pyramids, set four-square to the four points of the world, and blest by the sun-god Osiris twice in each year through all the centuries with a shadowless light, when he reaches vernal and autumnal equinox.

It is a pleasant walk from the church by the river up the little street. The cottages

lean one against the other, under the lee of the great hill at the top of the village, whose beech-crowned summit mounts eternal guard, protecting the valley-folk from south-west gales, cutting in two the heavy phalanx of the charging storm-clouds—turning their front and making them wheel right and left to expend their wrath up and down stream, a mile away—allowing passage only to the slow-following baggage-guard and camp-settler clouds, that they may relinquish in their transit some of their goodly supplies in a gently-falling shower—these, and many other kindly services does the great guardian perform for the little village.

At the top of the street, the high-road runs across a spur of the hill, past old Jabez Lack's cottage, past the Place Farm, past the chalk-pit, along a terrace cut in the hill-side, through the toll-gate, and then out of the parish and away over the open country.

As its name implies, Water-Stokeley is a river-village, and as such it is always considered. Its long white wooden bridge with



the toll-house on an island in the middle; its slow-grinding, old-fashioned mill, white with the flour-dust of two hundred years; its little wharf; its waterside inn, "The Old Red Row-barge;" its views of the river winding away through miles of wood and pasture-land; and, nearer home, the fat fair acres of its water-meadows—everything in Water-Stokeley speaks of the water, while behind, towers up the great What-Call-Hill, shutting out wind and weather and inland view.

Water-Stokeley turns to the river for its wants and news, and to the great hill for its protection.

It has looked to that river for its supplies and its hope, for over a thousand years. In dry seasons it was down-hearted; the beech-laden barges crouched in their river-bed, and resisted all efforts to turn them in their noon-day sleep, while the idle millers sought solace in the "Old Red Row-barge" inn. In spring, after flood-time, it was elate and joyful at the sight of its cattle eagerly

scattering over the rich new-made pasture in the water-meadows.

But Water-Stokeley remembers other events than these.

It can tell of a legion of strange faces, and of a standard pitched upon the opposite bank, over a tent floored with tessellated pavement. It remembers that these busy newcomers had soon drawn behind them a straight white road, and how at the crossing of the river—not where the wooden toll-bridge stands now, but three hundred yards below—it heard the grave old hill echo back the Roman shout, as the new stage of the great Ickneild-Street was begun.

And yet Water-Stokeley, although it is hardly conscious of the fact, stands as much on the edge of the downs as it does on the bank of the river.

You cannot tell here—outside the old coaching “Checquers Inn,” or from the road past the chalk-pit, that runs on for miles into the distance—where the river is turning and winding now, as if tired of the

road's companionship. See, now it wavers in wanton fashion, now returns and creeps alongside again for awhile, till at last in its dreamy indecision it is lost altogether. But come a little farther, before the night shall have hidden the downs. That is not the old high-road which runs on through the toll-gate—the Roman road is this little farm-road, branching abruptly off to the left. For one who goes this road, a hundred travel by the other. Old Zachary, the toll-keeper, sees many a face he does not know, passing the front of his house, but he knows each one, almost from birth upwards, that passes behind his garden, along the solitary farm-road. Zachary is not at his porch this evening, but as we go round by the back we can hear a little child's voice repeating the Lord's Prayer. As the sweet young accents float out of the open window, they are set to the music of the bells, which are ringing over the water, and in a pleasant peaceful evensong now that day is done.

The road winds rapidly round the hill, and in another moment the toll-house has disappeared, the sound of the bells is hushed, the water-meadows are hidden from our sight. How much lighter it has become! We are in an open valley, running north-westward up on to the downs, which shut it in at the end. The sun is saying farewell, ere he roll behind the ridge, and all the prospect is full of ripened light. What a transformation! The whole character of the land is changed. Trees and pastures have disappeared. Motionless atmosphere, abodes of men, all, all are gone. Here are freedom, solitary prospect, stillness, and an air which comes with playful puffs like the evening land-breeze at sea.

Down in the bottom, the land is under cultivation, and a few fields of rich corn stretch up the hill-side for a short distance; but farther away, the gold changes to grey, and the arching back of the ridge is bare, and runs slowly upwards to join its brethren in the west.

The arable land is chalky; they call it here, "white land." The hedges are getting lower; they will presently end altogether. The opposite side of the valley is steeper than it appears in this waning light, and the heavy Berkshire plough toils but slowly up those slopes, whistle as the ploughman may to the five sturdy norses drawn out in line.

These fields are farmed upon the ancient triennial rotation system. Do not deride, courteous friend. The farmer lives frugally; he is always at Lustlow on rent-day, his crops keep him and his family; the times do not affect him, he is contented.

These farm-buildings are the last gables we shall see. The farm-standing is large, but only a bailiff and his wife live here. The savage bay of the dog betokens that they are not at home. Strangers are rare in these parts—he knows every voice and foot-fall—hence his savageness. To him, unknown voices behind the barn portend mischief, so he rings the alarum, and wakes the neighbourhood.

The hedges have disappeared, the road is rutty and uneven ; the low-flying field-fares are the only living objects to be seen. The road is becoming more and more indistinct ; here on the turf, the sound of our footsteps no longer breaks the silence. We shall not meet a soul ; for nowadays, this is the road to Nowhere, except the sheep walks.

A shepherd or two, whose flocks are folded on the edge of the nearer downs, will come in at night by this way ; no one else cares to take this lonely route, though there are roads, ancient roads, across the downs for travellers who have business in this direction. But whose figure is this, tall and lithe and swinging, with a dog running by its side ?

Wait a moment, till it comes nearer.

Can it be Shepherd Ben ? Ah, no—it is no one at all—it is but the memory of him ! It was here, on this very spot, at this time of year, on an evening such as this, only two years ago, that we first spoke to him. The view is wide. All is still. He is not here.

He is at home already. There will be time before the light has quite gone, to get up on Cold-Kitchen Down, and perhaps to catch the last glimpse of the long Ridgeway in the west. We shall not see the fiery sun again to-night, but we shall be able to see some of the flames with which at sunset he warms the ever-too-chilly breast of the old many-wrinkled earth. That thin far-off scream of a train is the last sound which links us with the world of moving faces, miles away, across the river, and in the other shire. The sounds thread their way along the bottom, and are at last gathered together at the head of the valley, where they are hushed upon the smooth turf.

The rugged water-courses scar the side, and tell of storms gone by, and of long days of rain, which bring back to life once more the little ephemeral stream which in winter plays its tattoo on the stones. This steep ascent in the keen fresh breeze is a good test of a man's lungs. Many a long-armed,

long-winded Dane has stridden along this valley, and leaped up this ascent, laughing a daring laugh in the face of the wind that he loved so well, and that met him here with the memory of some forgotten breeze beyond the sea.

And now we are on the heights, and here is Cold-Kitchen Down, and beyond, down on down, till at last the ridge runs out alone towards the sunset, and is lost in the ruddy west.

What a broad expanse is this new prospect! Perhaps it is the total stillness which strikes us most forcibly. A stillness befitting this vast churchyard. See—here they lie, and there again—the eye soon learns to mark the resting-places of these valiant foes of old. Good stout bones are they which lie hidden here, and even to this day they tell something of the owners. Coarse rough attachments to the brown shafts indicate the big strong muscles which once moved them. Sometimes there is a thickened deposit, where a broken limb had



been repaired, once more to wield the battle-axe.

It is long since these old downs re-echoed to the clang of battle ; but they must remember the day, a thousand years ago, when a band of beaten men marched along the chalk-hills, sorely worn and troubled for the loss of the Fighting Alderman of Berkshire ; and how, a little later, the awful standard with the great black bird slowly rose over the edge of the down, and advanced from ridge to ridge, until hard by a stunted thorn-tree, the King of the dozen fights turned his men of Wessex round, and the great black bird stood still, and then moved on again, hovering over the raging fight, till by sunset Ashdown had been fought and won, and this side of the country was henceforth to bear the name, not of the "Black Raven," but of the "White Horse."

This is an old country, as Ben used to say ; the place, as far as eye can reach, is full of the bones of those who fell fighting in their battle-hats a thousand years ago.

But nowadays the downs and the long-crested Ridgeway are the haunts of rustic shepherds, and the down-crows and Blewbury wolves that feasted after Ashdown have vanished in the mist of ages ; and now the Leicester and the old Wilts and the South-down, and many another breed of white-woolled sheep, feed among the unremembered graves.

But it is time to go. Let us return by Hawkridge Down, that ridge between here and Cuckhamsly Hill—or rather Scratch-'o-my-Nob, as those who know it best call this chief of the chalk-range. That curiously-branched tree is Cold Oak ; it once stood far out on the downs, but modern civilisation has gradually encroached, until Cold Oak is now the land-mark where they end in this direction. Wait until we have passed by ; and now, look back—as he leans with his leafy burden, holding up two massive arms, he assumes the shape of that austere divine, John Knox, as he is represented when preaching before Mary Queen of Scots.

Ben had noticed the human-like outline, and used to say that Cold Oak "looked o' nights like a wight in trouble." He pointed out this oak to us one autumn afternoon, when every leaf had gone, and "John Knox," as a skeleton, was unrecognisable. The skeleton reared up desolate and mawkin-wise on the edge of the silent chalk-range—when suddenly the whole tree became clothed and alive, and shook with movement and commotion; for in the stead of every fallen leaf there perched a swallow. It was an extraordinary sight, this "Talking Oak," once more wakened up in the dying autumn afternoon, to tell of bud and bloom, to give a parting message; but it was for a moment only, and the empty branches slowly waned toward a fast-disappearing cloud, which sank away in the south as Cold Oak went off to sleep again,

"Through the dreary-nighted December,"

through the silence and the snow, through  
the wet and windy month.

Some passages in Ben's short and uneventful life are not uninteresting; and here, where everything suggests his memory, it is not unfitting to relate them. The village neighbours (of whom it might be said, not that they knew him, but that they knew *of* him) described Ben as a gipsy; and certainly his tall, lithesome figure, his tawny complexion, his glossy black hair, and his piercing eyes bore out their description. Then his name—Ben Boswell—was one of acknowledged gipsy origin; while his mother, the widow Boswell, is currently reported to have first opened her eyes and her mouth in the chalk-pit—and to be born in a chalk-pit is but a variation of being born “under a hedge.”

This must have been more than five-and-forty years ago; but the chalk-pit is still a favourite resort, and affords periodic shelter to many a travelling camp of gipsies. Ben was never observed to hold communication with any of these visitors, and the widow Boswell lived until her death in a Christian

habitation—to wit, the second in the row of cottages that stand at the end of the village ; her neighbours being, on the one side, old George Thickens, and upon the other, Jabez Lack. It is true that a domiciliary inspection revealed the fact that there were but two rooms in the widow's cottage, and that in the front room, the creaky stairs were boarded over at the top, debarring further ascent, and were used as a cupboard, the ten steps serving for as many shelves. It is also certain, from the strange noises overhead, that the room above, acquired at some time or other unknown, was now most certainly in the possession of the Lack family. It will be seen, therefore, that it is more truthful to say that the widow Boswell and her son, inhabited half a cottage. But, viewed from the road, their residence presented a very respectable frontage, formed by the three habitations ; and as the widow Boswell's door was the only one facing the road, the whole appeared like a good old-fashioned country-house of some consider-

able size. And this is what it had been, a hundred years ago ; but things had gradually been altered, rooms had been divided, doors made, and doors closed up, until at last the widow Boswell lived and slept in what had once been the hall of the old farm.

If Ben's appearance betokened gipsy origin, his habits were in no wise nomadic—they were pastoral, rather than predatory ; he possessed neither deceit nor subtlety, he practised neither augury, palmistry, nor any other gipsy science. The widow Boswell had never been accused of telling a fortune in her life—indeed, she had never even been known to tell her own. Perhaps it was the fact of having a fixed habitation during some five-and-twenty years of her life—or, may be, it was only the strict honesty and absence of all wily device in both mother and son, which had lived down the suspicion and opprobrium usually awarded by the virtuous villagers to a feared and hated race. For does not even the charitable Sir Thomas Browne describe gipsies as “ coun-

terfeit Moors, banished by most Christian Princes," and can only add in their favour, "yet have found some countenance from the Great Turk?"

Ben's nature was as reserved as his face, but that reserve once penetrated, discovered a mind surprisingly innocent and child-like, instead of the half-expected dark and sinister characteristics. For a young man, he was so quiet and gentle in all his actions, and withal so strictly honest and sober, that it was hardly to be wondered at, when the villagers thought they had made the discovery that he was "a bit simple"—slep' out in a bean-field," as old Jabez Lack put it. Ben's manner in speaking was most striking, and reminded one of the grave courtliness of a Spanish hidalgo; as the words fell softly from between his regular and beautiful teeth, all dialectic and ungrammatical peculiarity passed unnoticed. As he stood in his short brown jacket, with his smock on his arm, and his staff in his hand, one's eye unconsciously wandered

from the picturesque peasant's garb, and instinctively sought the face; and then one forgot the poor Berkshire shepherd, and thought instead of Pedro de Alvarado, or Francisco de Lugo, who one time stood beside stout-hearted Cortes.

Our friend Easleoff was in the habit of saying, "Gad! I'll paint that fellow some day. Sunset effect behind the Otterford elms, eh? Hurdles running into middle-distance, eh? Shepherd in foreground, looking over—new idea, eh? Call it, 'Safe for the Night,' eh? Take with the public, eh?" But Death stepped in and claimed the model, and there is no portrait of Ben.

That Ben, though young, was a very pains-taking and astute shepherd, every one admitted. No one lost fewer sheep, and no one knew better than he when and where to change their pasture; even the malcontent Bottleback, who had a black name for everybody, said, "that gipsy feller, Ben, was like all the lot, a knowin' one on the downs." Ben was a close and careful observer of his charges,



and much of his knowledge was contained in rhyme, as for instance :

“ The smartest shepherd as ever run  
Can’t tell if the ship goes twenty weeks, or twenty-  
one.”

Ben was gifted with the usual amount of superstition common to the children of the mist ; but yet it was surprising how often the bit of primitive wisdom, the wise saw, which had called forth the incredulous smile, revealed a meaning, a “ something rich and strange,” even a scientific truth when thought over more attentively at home. It might sound strange to be told by Ben, that walking among his flock, when he led them out of the fold in the morning, “ did his chest good, when he felt feeble ; ” and put as it was, in Ben’s innocent and credulous manner, might perhaps awaken in the educated listener some sarcastic reflections on the ignorance of rustics. But in this matter Berkshire Ben was no more ignorant than Richard Whateley, who in his youth sought this same remedy under

advice of the faculty. When it is remembered that in Archbishop Whateley's infancy the study of the gases was a new thing, and that Ben's method was then the readiest known way of inhaling carbolic acid, his ignorance becomes only comparative, to say the least. It would not have been safe to laugh at a certain sombre scientific physician, who appeared one morning riding up Park-Street, Bristol, on a broken-winded horse, whose nose was inserted in a large gas-bag ; but there was less risk to one's credit in laughing at poor Ben standing among his misty sheep.

Ben was not often in the village. When he came home, instead of joining the little knot of evening idlers round the well in front of the "Checquers," he generally kept within doors, and if perchance any one who had seen "Help," go down the street, asked of widow Boswell where her son was, she would reply, "In bed." An answer which was sure to be stored up as one more instance of Ben's "simpleness." Mrs. Rench,

the policeman's wife, took the "simple" view also; but, being a kindly creature, would add, "Poor lad, it be a mighty pity as 'e aint got no one to look arter 'im better, when 'e comes in from the wet. Widow Boswell never war no manager like, an' now she be that weakly, she warnts some 'un to look arter herself."

But if Ben retired early he was out on the downs in the van of the dawn, and leading five hundred sheep to pasture. A curious chance threw a light, literal and metaphorical, upon Ben's character, which no number of years will ever extinguish. It fell about in this manner. We were coming from Hillsley, and adopting the crow's tactics without that bird's success, found ourselves just as the sun was getting behind the Ridgeway, on the solitary brow of Dark Head Down. It was a lonesome place, with not even a shepherd's shelter in sight, nor any sound, except when the stillness was broken by a great robber-bee booming past in homeward flight. Downs, downs,

and the giant Ridgeway! Hill after hill, curving and sloping away in the direction of the unseen river, and broad deep valleys between each barren rock. The next ridge which we had to cross was somewhat lower than the others, and in the fading light was losing its contour, and becoming gradually obscured against the side of the greater Millowbury Down. Suddenly, a ruddy glow appeared on the side of the "Bury" Down, marking out in sharp outline the shoulder of the nearer one. Then a light peeped over the top, and a little tongue of bright yellow flame shot up. It was evidently a fire, but this part of the down was as bleak a place as any to be found, and afforded no fuel either in stunted tree, or furze, or wind-blown juniper bush, neither was there any shepherd's shelter upon its windy terraces. The light increased as the growing darkness made it visible. Crossing the bottom, and toiling up the dark and slippery turf on the opposite side, took some little time, for a warm gentle rain was

beginning to fall. Once upon the crest, a strange sight met the gaze. Half-way up the opposite valley, upon a sloping terrace, was a van, such as gipsies inhabit, but it was enveloped in flames. Along the roof ran a fringe of fire darting madly hither and thither; while out of the side-window came a cloud of smoke, which rose erect and stationary, like some vast basaltic column, and was lost at last in the murky atmosphere.

It was a horrible sight, this helpless van held in the leaping flames which lighted up the downs, and threw strange shadows about their sides, yet was itself surrounded in deepest gloom, like a picture in a black frame.

Amid the crackling there came forth a sound; it was a human voice—and presently from out the surrounding darkness appeared a huge man, and then other figures, some of them women and children, but these latter only to be distinguished by their relative size, for all were magnified in the rising vapour till they looked like a family of giants. As they passed in procession,

enormous shadows swept across the hillside, or hovered for a moment with a frightful uncertainty. Almost the strangest feature of this strange scene was the incredible apathy which all appeared to exhibit, as the figures stood or moved quietly about the field of this marvellous magic-lantern. No one made the slightest effort to get the flames under. One figure lifted a gigantic arm, and as its shadow threw a mammoth print of five huge fingers upon a low and blood-red cloud the silhouettes sent up a hideous wailing cry, and in a moment the motionless hand which hung in the cloud was withdrawn with magical swiftness.

The black column rose and lifted itself out of sight as the fire burned brighter and clearer, and by the lurid light there appeared three or four other travelling vans advancing for a moment, and then again retreating into the gloom. The apathy, the absence of all signs of confusion, and the unearthly demoniacal wail, made the scene as unaccountable and as frightful as a bad dream.

Now only one figure was to be seen, and that one suddenly dwindled down almost to natural size, presenting an extraordinary optical effect, and at the same moment the roof and sides of the van fell together, and the whole vehicle collapsed into a shapeless mass, while behind us a low rumbling sound echoed back from the hill.

The flames burned on, above what was now but a bonfire; and the figures reappeared, drawing closer, and growing suddenly larger, becoming contorted like vibrating phantoms, while across the field of flame was seen what might have been a donkey, had not a mournful howl from the hill behind told his race. The optical phenomena lent all kinds of fantastic ghastliness and vagary to the spectacle.

The fire began to burn lower, and the hovering forms grew dimmer and less defined, and their spectre-shadows rolled off the hill-side. A light left the fire, and slowly crawled along in the direction of the fire van; then it went out for an instant;

then it appeared again and ultimately remained stationary. Soon, another came forth travelling in the same direction, and voices mingled with the measured drip, drip of the rain-drops, as they fell upon our hat. It was a most unaccountable revelation, a perfect panoramic vision of witches, hobgoblins, gnomes, kobolds, salamanders, and all other unclean fiends, which inhabit the deepest, darkest crypts of demonology. That these were Satanic ambassadors sent to "materialise" upon the outskirts of the kingdom of the Prince of Darkness, was not, for the moment, an utterly impossible conjecture. That they were gipsies—thieves—incendiaries (though, it must be owned, apparently of their own chattels), but at any rate doubtful and dangerous folk—it might be, even murderers—was plain, and made a nearer approach, a matter of hesitation. Walking in a guarded and round-about fashion towards the scene of the mysterious conflagration, only confirmed the conclusion that this was a gipsy encampment.



Perhaps, to-night, with the gentle hay-moon throwing a light upon the confines of civilisation, and we well on our road homeward, you may wonder that thirst for knowledge did not urge us to a nearer approach; but that awe-inspiring scene upon the lonely down, with no brave friend near to share our adventure, may excuse us for having allowed the darkness and solitariness and rain of that night to dilute curiosity with caution. You smile, as you hear our footfalls ring on the road, but would you have dared laugh up on Millowbury Down, as your feet touched the slippery turf with never a sound, and you trod as in a dream, and only your own breathing told you that it was *not* an ugly dream? But you shall hear and partake of my undeserved good fortune.

I turned down into the bottom, looking back more than once at the waning fire, which now burned with a dull red glow like a red-hot lime-kiln, but soon a spur of the down drew its dark shutter across the view. I walked on for some time, and was striking

across a rugged watercourse, when a stone jumped from its lodgement, and as it rattled down the gully, a deep prolonged baying broke from above, and some way on ahead. A few moments more, and what looked like a terminal statue figured from out the hill-side, imminent against the dusky sky. A cheerful "Hullo, down there!" very silvery, and with nothing malignant in its tone, diverted an angry canine epilogue, and revealed the welcome presence of Shepherd Ben. Clambering hastily up the slippery ascent, I hurriedly related what I had seen to Ben, who was as much surprised as myself at this sudden rencontre. "I knows as yer prowls about the downs, sir, time an' time about," he said, "I've seed yer on 'most all on 'em." The smell of smoke clinging about him rendered it unnecessary for Ben to state that he had just come from the fire. It appeared too, that it was his donkey—I mean dog—which went phantom-wise to and fro in front of the flames.

In that memorable walk home, the whole

affair and many more were related by the usually so reserved Ben, grown voluble, even eloquent, in the favouring darkness, which has been the encourager of discovery and friendship through all the ages, doing what the light had failed, and would ever have failed to do for man, bred up to challenge his fellow-men from afar. Light is good, is wholesome; but in all time, to many mortals, it has been in darkness that a kindred heart was first heard to beat.

Ben had a history; and he told it unhesitatingly that night on the downs. Ben was a gipsy—that is, his father was one. His mother came of a “mixed race,” and though she possessed the claim of having been born in a chalk-pit, among a camp of true gipsies, she was never admitted by the tribe to the higher rites which were the prerogative of true kinship. As she grew up, she developed qualities diametrically opposed to gipsy sentiment and precept. As a child, she had begged so badly, that it was perfectly hopeless to suppose she could ever

be successfully educated] in the higher subtleties of thieving. She never took kindly to the advances of the men, or the proffered aid of the women, who vainly tried to discover, or to implant in the young girl any aptitude for the sciences of abstraction or sorcery. She was but a "Gorgio" in gipsy's clothing.

However, for all this, and in spite of the oldest tradition of his ancient clan, Gilderoy Boswell, of royal blood, of the immemorially straight-haired, if not straight-moralled family, fell in love with this poor outcast of an outcast race.

For this grave departure from gipsy morality, Gilderoy Boswell lost caste to such an extent that no one could be found to perform the mystic marriage rites; and Gilderoy, with his young "Videy," went off to Norwood Church, and there obtained their wish, upon a somewhat surer footing, in front of the altar-rails, or, as Ben put it, "Everything put down right an' proper—mother's told us often."

It appears, however, that the headstrong Gilderoy did not thrive in thus kicking over conservative principles, for he lost his rank as chief of the tribe.

Degraded and dishonoured by his own people, Gilderoy had his van re-fitted, and painted a lively yellow, at Guildford, and set off alone with his young bride, to peddle horn-spoons and pannikins from shire to shire, apparently now subsisting entirely upon love and honesty. But it was but a brief period of happiness that was allotted to the wayward Gilderoy. The awful curse which old Mother Hatseggan had pronounced—putting her brown bony forefinger to her scimeter-curved nose, as she hissed after the departing lovers,

“Three years, three moons,  
Then the doxie croons.”

proved almost verbally true, for, after three years and about as many months of wedded wandering, Gilderoy died, as Ben pathetically phrased it, “’Cos he war weak ’bout the breathin’ bags.”

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The widow, herself a mere child, with a younger one at her breast, and another just able to crawl into mischief, moved about for a time from village to village, until she had sold her little stock. Innocent, helpless, broken-hearted, and alone, with nothing in the world but her two babes and Gilde-roy's shaggy mare, to tell her trouble to, she wandered she knew not where or whither. She became reduced in circumstances, and, ignorant of all means of getting a living, determined to sell her home, and then Geranium, the old mare, the last link, except her children, which bound her to her old life. But respectable honest folk, that is to say, villagers, would have nothing to do with her; and, victim as she was of her misused gipsy-training, it never entered her head to beg or steal. In this plight, she wandered on, not knowing whether she was most lonely by night or by day; often for days and days not speaking to a soul except her two suppliants, and the old mare. Friendless and frightened at the hard and

horny faces which peered suspiciously at her from cottage-doors, she strayed along by devious ways, until, brought down to the lowest stage of deprivation, she sought refuge, for the sake of her helpless babes, in the Union at Stow-Sutton. In virtue of the chalk-pit, the widow's parish was Water-Stokeley ; and it was thus that she ultimately came to live here. The old Squire at the Great House, happening to hear her sad and remarkable tale, when she was brought before the Board, asked her what her name was, and upon her answering, "Videy Boswell," and explaining that "Videy" was short for Providence, the hard-riding cross-country J.P. jumped up, and hastily left his chair, while a loud and very unmagisterial coverside "Damme" was heard running round the four white-washed walls of the Board-room, and following the retreating Squire down the passage.

The order was made out for her admittance to the Union, but instead of going to Stow-Sutton, she was taken in a fly to

Water-Stokeley, and lodged with old Betty Lack, where, as time went on, the child-mother was taught laundry-work ; and when some years after, old Betty died, the widow Boswell moved next door to Jabez Lack's,—who, by the way, was “no relation nor no friend neither, to old Betty, his namesake.” Here the widow Boswell supported herself by taking in washing, until within the last few years of her life, when, her health utterly breaking up, she received some slight parish-relief to help eke out the pittance which Ben could spare her out of his small wages.

The widow Boswell's face was the strangest combination ; she was in years but a young middle-aged woman, her features were, if one stayed to analyse them, those of a young girl, but the expression altered all, and it was *old* widow Boswell that you talked with. Ben used so say, “Mother 'ud 'ave gone daft if so be as she hadn't 'ave 'ad us two and the old mare to talk to.”

Dan Boswell, the elder of the two brothers,



grew up, and after getting into sundry village-scrapes, owing to his popularity and the wild unfettered freedom of his habits, had left Water-Stokeley some ten years back, and rumour reported that he had been seen "along with the gipsies." Ben, the "simple" one, remained with his mother, tending sheep. Ben's aim in life appeared to be, doing his duty on the downs, and in his spare time looking after the broken-widow down Boswell.

Even the seductive speech of Mr. Blewrewin, when that orator was arguing on the advantages derived by "Union men," and advocating agricultural strikes from a waggon in the "Checquers field"—strikes

"From shore to shore,

Till suns shall rise and set no more—"

even this failed to "draw" Ben. When Mr. Blewrewin, mopping off some more allegorical quotations from his flaming face, and shaking them indiscriminately out of his red pocket-handkerchief upon the much-impressed crowd of rustics, stated that "the worthy agent for this village, who you all

know, Mr. Jabez Lack, will now address the meeting," Ben only looked grave and incredulous; nor did he join in the rural cheer and shout of admiration which followed. And when—after Mr. Jabez Lack; endeavouring to speak, but overcome by the momentous issues which hung upon his eloquence, had uttered the one word "Strike"—and forthwith had led the way by toppling over the side of the cart on to his head, Ben did not join in the general laugh. Lastly, when the meeting was brought to a close with a Union song set to a hymn-tune, with an oft-recurring chorus of

" Farmers, don't yer like it?  
Farmers, don't yer like it?  
Yer 'aven't a word to say !"

Ben quietly called his dog, and went home to bed.

But *you* are not thinking of Ben at all—your thoughts are up on Millowbury Down. Forgive the digression—*you* did not know Ben.

Well, about the conflagration. It was no chance fire. It was the performance of a solemn rite, though seldom put in practice nowadays, for obvious reasons. It appeared that Ben had seen the flames from Blewbury Down, and going across, had come upon a camp of gipsies, who were not of his tribe, but with whom he could communicate, and who immediately invited him to join in their strange demonstration.

The van they were burning had been the property of a poor woman who had been murdered by her paramour, and they had brought it up here upon the downs, that they might pay the last sad honours without molestation. As there were no children or relatives to be provided for, the horse became the property of the head of the tribe, Bill Wackerdoll; while, as an ancient mode of showing respect to the unfortunate deceased, Viriamenter Herne, it had been decided to burn the cart with funeral honours.

Her bed-clothes, her blankets, her fiddle, her love-charms, even her little grindstone,

were all neatly arranged within the empty van ; and then Bill Wackerdoll, after making a speech, proceeded to set light to the whole, while the other men and women and children slowly paraded round the funeral pyre. Then Bill Wackerdoll raised aloft his hand—that hand which had stood still in the cloud, raised to elevate the fearful curse before the murderer's soul.

The tribe was an old and a very conservative one. Its members were true gipsies, and from time out of mind had never known the importation of a drop of Gorgio blood. They had married and inter-married, but the men had been faithful and the women true to the solemn oaths they had taken. Thus are good and evil blended, and the virtue of these outcasts stands intact, through all vicissitudes, as an example for all who would boast of long descent, and a warning to us who would add one more banner to the family tree. Ben told us that Bill Wackerdoll alluded more than once to his own father's disgrace, and its well-merited

reward for "breaking the blood," of such a noble line of unstained ancestry. He knew, too, of Hatseggan's curse, but appeared surprised when Ben told him that his mother was still living. Bill Wackerdoll had advised Ben to give up shepherding and join Dan, of whom he spoke as a good low-caste gipsy.

On a subsequent occasion, we visited the spot, which for years to come will shew the scar of that night to him who knows where to look. The scorched turf surrounded a low heap of white ashes, on which lay four rusty old iron tyres ; and when one day the future archæologist, grubbing on these slopes, comes upon four corroded rings, we shall not be there to question the propriety of labelling them "Roman—date uncertain."

The night of the solemn obsequies clenched a friendship, which brought about many another meeting, and many another talk with Ben. "The stranger as prowled about over they downs," still shewed this

propensity, but now more often in company. The "Dialogues between a Shepherd and a Gentleman"—though held not upon a brown and musty broadsheet, beneath a rude wood-cut of the disputants, but upon the open Berkshire downs, beneath sun and clouds and sky, and the Twin Pointers, and the Waggoner, and Regulus with his reaping hook—ended, as on the broadsheet, in the real shepherd winning the gentleman over to his opinion of the superiority of shepherding to all other ways, and in sorely tempting the gentleman to reply in the very words of the broadsheet :—

"It needs must be confest that your calling is the best,  
No longer discourse with you I can ;  
But henceforth I will pray, by night and by day,  
Heaven bless the honest husbandman."

Ben would doubtless have wondered what particular form of garget or foot-rot a "poet" was, yet nevertheless he had the poetic faculty largely developed within him. He watched natural signs and effects, but these alone did not content him ; for, as he

used to say, "There's a summat in every thing as means more nor *we* sees."

Ben had dainty fancies, which worked out of him like the holes in his smock, but which had to be quickly mended again, that he might look neat and respectable, and like his fellow-shepherds. He had never been taught to think, and yet everything that he said was full of thought ; and often the wisdom which he unconsciously uttered proved itself no feeble fledgling, albeit reared in the lowly nest of hedge-philosophy. Ben was in the habit of using words, monosyllabic and common enough in themselves, in a wrong sense ; but they always conveyed a meaning as new and original as if the greatest powers of expression which education can give had been at his command. Perhaps it was this free using of the few tools at his command, which begot him the name of "simple" among his neighbours—who acknowledged, nevertheless, that Ben was a smart "herd," and as good a folder as any on the downs. When, one evening, being discovered resting on his

road home, he vouchsafed to Pibbles the remark that "Looking up at the moon makes yer blink yer eyes," he there and then let himself in for the nickname of "Moon-struck Ben." No one, however, could have found any evidence of organic weakness of any kind in Ben's flashing and far-piercing eyes; and his taking most of the things said concerning himself with a certain lethargic placidity, was not to be mistaken for "meek-heartedness." We once saw Ben resent an unprovoked insult offered him at a Hillsley Fair, with prompt retaliation which to one who remembered what blood it was which mounted to his temples, was terrible to behold.

It would be untrue, in describing Ben's character, to ignore the fact that he was very superstitious. He was no ideal Tityrus or classic Corydon, whose

"Flocks orespred the flourie plaine;"

he was only the Shepherd of Cold-Kitchen Down, and this realistic weakness of his



nature must have its place upon the canvas. It was very easy to join in the traditional laugh of Jabez Lack, and the rest of the non-church-going neighbours, when they recounted how it had been discovered that Ben believed the following supplication was to be found in the Litany.

“From wizards, and witches, and long-tailed buzzards,  
And crawling things that creep in hedge-bottoms,  
Good Lord, deliver us.”

Yet touch this ignorance tenderly, for do we not all share it in some shape or other?

As the shepherds said, “Ben had a way of his own.” Though he was but a little over five-and-twenty, his reserve inspired strangers with a sense of stability of purpose which ten more years often fail to give. It was a tacitly acknowledged postulate that Ben was older and graver than his years. At the shearing-feast and churn-supper, Ben, who was always present, would take his pleasure more after the fashion of the elder folk; if his old friend Smallbone was not there, he would prefer to sit by himself in some quiet corner,

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seldom speaking unless spoken to, but keenly watching everything around him. It was remarkable that the agile young shepherd should choose rather to sit with the rugged Help between his gaiters, than to join in the dance with the gaily-laughing lasses, most of whom admired, though with some awe, Ben's fine olive complexion and brilliant eyes. It was a grief to more than one of them that the supple-limbed Ben, who could so easily have out-danced the other heavy-shooned lads, should so persistently withstand both the coaxings and the taunts of the pretty beseechers who would at last petulantly give him up, as "a bit too solemn." On the other hand, he had been known to rise and burst out unbidden with some song, the like of which the oldest shepherds could not call to mind, and which he would sing with a clear voice and a well-marked delivery which drew the attention of everyone to him. His fire and force would fill every one with enthusiasm, and even if as sometimes happened, not one word was

understood, yet many a listener would say, "That be a fine song, Maister Ben, an' very well sung, that it be." Probably, these songs, which were not understood by the hill-folk, were sung in the Rommany tongue; but others were "country-side songs" only in their character, and while often relating to well-known places in the long sheep-feeding range of hills, were yet totally new and unknown to the hearers, and caused great conjecture and perplexity as to their origin, which even Ben could not clear up for them.

Already, "Young Ben" was considered "a character" by his neighbours; and had he lived to grow old upon the downs, he would probably have been held a great authority on many other than sheep-matters. But for want of a better description, he remained, and will now be remembered on the downs, as "a character." This incomplete title is, however, not his fault, but the fault of his critics. Had he lived, he might have become a rustic Gilbert White, of the hill-country:

at least, nothing escaped him, which related to clouds and aërial phenomena, from the "Pride of the Morning," to the blackest storm-cloud; from the "Star that dogged the Moon," to the rain-portending "Merry Dancers." His meteorological powers of vision were borrowed from the eyes of animals, his aneroidal accuracy from their keener sensibilities, and his forecasts and prognostications from that world of whispers, where Nature reigns, dumb only to those who have no eyes or ears. Ben was a complete note-book of spring arrival and migration. Standing beside him, and being helped to look with his piercing eyes, hollow sky and deserted down became suddenly, as if by magic, loud with the busy hum of life.

Motion, Increase, Life, Advance in all things, these were the thoughts you brought away with you after a talk on the downs with Ben, who knew no more of Development or First Cause than the most sagacious follower in that great pack, which still at fault, sniffs, seeking far and wide, the last scent of Force

and Matter : and strange to say, his theory seemed to be the simplest of them all, though he was but a poor earth-stopper in the hunt.

On a bright bitter day in January, when all around was silent beneath the white hood of winter ; the lands empty and desolate, the view large and void, the sun pinched and blanched, Ben, apparently guessing our unexpressed thoughts, broke the silence by saying, as if in reply, " But there *be* plenty o' things a-stirrin', even a day like this, sir. Here be we two, as Farmer Littlechild behind the hill doänt reckon on, as we're a-comin' to tell 'im master's got 'is three tups as they lost last week ; there be plenty o' things a-stirrin'. Look ye 'ere—'ere be a smart few enjoying themselves," and as he spoke he scrambled over to a sheltered hollow, where was a little cloud of large dark-coloured *dipterae*. These winter-gnats were winging round and round in mazy fashion, as if they were dancing over the anthers of a hot August poppy ; up and down they went,

round and round, full with joy at the secret they had discovered in the one warm place in a cold and barren world. As we walked on, Ben repeated some verses on what he called the "winter dancers," which we afterwards found were not traditional folk-lore, but (so Smallbone told us) "all made up out o' Ben's own 'yed."

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Many were the times we had with Ben, but it was only by little and little that it occurred to him to mention those things in which we were more particularly interested. Perhaps that time when Ben took ten-score of sheep to the Hillsley fair was one of the most productive episodes.

Hillsley, huddled up in a hollow, far out on the downs, has a weekly fair, from the Wednesday next after Easter up to Whitsuntide; and, later on, in the autumn months, several of the largest sheep-fairs in the kingdom are held there.

It was a rare walk, that early morning in autumn, along the HawkrIDGE, and across the

old Roman road which here re-appears after a disappearance of several miles, on its way to—well, no matter where. Let the archæologists delight to wrangle and fight as to whether this was the *Via* along which marched Roman reinforcements for Calleva; or whether it is part of the old highway to Aquae Solis through Spinae; or again, the direct route from Tripontum in Middle England down to Venta in Britannia Prima—it is little matter; for nowadays the grand old piece of engineering is broken and unconnected, and leads like a sheep-walk one knows not whither, serving in places only for a name and a land-mark, to lead homeward the great grand-children of the conquered race.

The march of the flock was by no means slow; the woolly regiments hurried along, now herding together along a ridge, now dipping over the brow, deploying and assimilating themselves to the curving hill-side, while Help ran forward, from time to time, to inspect the ranks, and see that no opening

was made and that good order generally was preserved. Sometimes over the crest of some distant hill in the range, a gleaming white cloud would appear slowly moving across the face of the down, and at last resolving itself into another flock, also on its way to the Hillsley Fair.

The appearance and disappearance of these flocks as they slowly wound about the slopes gave a most picturesque effect to the grey-green hill distances. Once, Ben waved a red pocket-handkerchief, and immediately after another red signal waved a reply from the crest of the opposite ridge, over which poured a compact little flock that hastened down the hill-side into the hollow. Ben informed us that this was old Smallbone, the shepherd of Staddlestone Down, but added with a critical glance, "The old man aint got much o' a flock fo' this market."

Presently, upon the freely-moving wind there was borne a confused sound that rose and sank again; but it was immediately repeated—this time louder, and caught up



and carried about as in a whirlwind. There was nothing to be seen for miles ahead but downs with little white clouds moving across them, while the murmur increased, and now took the character of a distant blatant roar. Small, well-defined, rounded clouds appeared on every down, and closed in near, as on a hot July morning before fair weather. Slowly these gathered together towards a dip in the next down ahead, whence soon began to rise a mighty ceaseless hubbub. As we came over the edge, a little village appeared in the bottom, but now surrounded by what might have been acres of bleached linen laid out to dry. The cloudy invasion poured down into the noisy valley from all sides. Now and then the spokes of dog-carts glistened in the sun, as they spun along the neighbouring ridges. What a commotion for such a little village! A hundred red gables perhaps, and a little toy-church, but the whole choked with these white invaders, and a mist of rising dust. Now the tireless roar is varied from time to time by

human shouts, and the barking of dogs. The noise rises from the basin, and becomes deafening. How many sheep are there? Ben, with a pre-occupied and somewhat anxious expression, answered, "Only twenty thousand, sir"—implying that this great Fair was not the greatest. But it was time to leave Ben; we were in a road now, and Ben, half-hidden in rising steam, was shouting with the rest, and aiding his dog to prevent the mixing of any of his own sheep with other flocks.

So we went forward alone, down the road which was tattooed with a myriad little hoof-marks. Dogs rushed to and fro in a hurry, which did not even give them time to draw in their hanging tongues. Men, hoarse with hooting, hobbled after refractory hoggerels. Hot dust hung in the air, rested grittily upon one's lips, covered one's boots—while above all rose the cry of twenty-thousand bleatings. The fair was held within the little village; permanent pens and enclosed paddocks were to be seen between every house. Everything

was in motion—here, the hastening and hurrying of sheep going to take up their position, there, the heaving backs of those already penned. Nearly every house had a yard, and every yard a gig; while at the back of the “Snap-Dragon,” and the “Shepherds’ Rest,” were rows of gigs that might have lined a race-course. Only the old church was silent; his grey tower stood up in the middle of all this din, stately and deserted, the gates locked, and all forcibly reminding man of his two estates. The buying and selling was going on briskly around, farmers criticising their own and their neighbours’ pens—stalwart Berkshire boys whose business principles appeared to be astuteness combined with jocularity. Not a bargain was made without as much laughter and as many jokes as there were sheep transferred. To pens already full to repletion, fresh sheep were added—captured recreants who were turned all of a heap on the backs of the already penned ones, and who sorted themselves in time, by gradually scrambling

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and wriggling down to their proper level on *terra firma*. More sheep were added, and yet more sheep, till to the inexperienced eye there appeared but a pen of sheep's noses. Mates of merchant-vessels should have come here to learn to what a science stowage can be pushed.

"Caleb," says one smart shepherd; "We'll 'ave one more—that there big-faced teg's a-blowing hisself out," and so one more is added to the steaming—but now no longer struggling—mass. However, as Ben said afterwards, "Wool gives an' takes a power o' packing." But a ready answer was hardly so forthcoming, when Ben was asked as to the capacities for compression possessed by the shearing wethers.

But the most interesting faces were those of the shepherds, who stood beside each enclosure—grim, grizzled, grey men, who had been born and bred, and lived and moved in wind—faces furrowed with the gales of half-a-century. Honest, rugged-looking fellows, whose wiry frames seemed to have

resisted (outwardly, at all events) wet and exposure.

A curious feature in the fair was the entire absence of women. Not one woman or child was to be seen in the street. Passing open cottage doors, a brief glance might perhaps be obtained of a bodiless skirt, which indicated by some slight movement that it was tenanted at present by an industrious woman who bent undisturbed to her work.

Ben was presiding over his sheep, which had been parted into two flocks in a double pen. As we came up, he observed to us that no one face was like another; and certainly under this favourable chance for inspection, the more one looked, the more one felt the truth of this observation. Ben would often say that after a while he could tell very many of his sheep by their bleat; and one has only to get an opportunity of hearing the infinite number of variations in the key to learn that, like many other things, the impossibility lies not in Nature's sentences, but in our reading from an incomplete alphabet.

Ben's master had had a good offer, but the bargain was not closed yet, so we went off to the field at the back of the "Snap-Dragon," where they were selling the stock sheep by auction. The rostrum was a waggon around which stood in horse-shoe a crowd of spectators. Massive tups and tegs, fetching prices which would have frightened our fathers; wide-backed ewes, shearlings, and two shear rams were brought into the arena, and walked or pushed round. As the animal was knocked down to a buyer and led away through the crowd, a loud, "Make way for the tup, Gentleman!" would generally follow a bolt of that worthy, who had already made way for himself by pushing over two or three of the less wary of the bystanders. The tup in question would, on finding himself in the centre, stand and stare like a baited bull, with a wild uncertain eye, and on hearing his description, and being told to "shew himself, and bear out the gentleman's statements," would suddenly butt all round, probably to clear a wider space

for his next performance, as is customary among road-side conjurors. This done, he would rear, or back, or roll on the ground, tearing the rope out of the attendant's hand, and effectually tying himself up into knots—but in so doing indisputably confirming the statement he was a “a good sound tup.”

The remarks of the auctioneer, and the sapient comments of his audience (which were of the friendly argumentative type) caused much merriment from time to time. The linguistic powers of the former culminated when a fine heavy South-down ewe was brought forward, the like of which he declared he had rarely seen, and which produced so much emotion in the auctioneer that mere prose could not contain his words, and, glancing alternately from the beautiful Leicester ewe in front of him to the back of his own eyelids, he described her as :

“ Wide in her hips, and calm in her eyes,  
Broad in her shoulders, and full in her thighs,  
Round and deep in her barrel, and long in her rump,  
A straight and flat back without ever a hump.”

While the price is running up, and admiring comments are heard on all sides, by some psychological link the mind, not agriculturally constructed, is irresistibly reminded of the advantages to be derived from concealing one's ignorance — for Squire Littlechild informs us afterwards that this was the young auctioneer's maiden-sale.

But it was twelve o'clock, and the "Ordinary" at the "Snap-Dragon" was ready. The bell was ringing, and there was a little hubbub among the farmers.

The host must indeed be a master of animal economy, who can derive profit from the hundred clients that we sat down with, and who are wont to perform their gastronomic prodigies upon him at least a dozen times a year. It was good to see a few of the older farmers closing their morning's business over a horn of Berkshire ale; but it was a less pleasant sight to witness the younger ones celebrating their bargains with champagne. Ben had sold his sheep just before dinner, and as we were leaving the fair, we overtook



him returning home. He was leaving early ; but except for shepherds who had flocks to drive off there was nothing to do now, but to stand about and drink, so Ben, after serving his master, had started home.

There were many flocks coming away, driven by other shepherds than those who had brought them into the fair. As we overtook returning flocks, Help, off duty himself, erected his semi-pendent ears, and occupied himself in watching the manner in which the other dogs worked *their* sheep. No artizan could have criticised a brother workman with more interest than did Help—Help, the quondam puppy at the Place Farm, who rolled over convalescent gimmer-lambs of six seasons back, but who was now grown to dog's estate, and with a fame of his own borne far and wide—Help, best of that faithful fraternity, whose members do their duty, not only beneath Cepheus and the Northern Crown, but in the far grazing-grounds lit up by Centaur and the Southern Cross.

Never within the memory of man—who has watched degeneracy and death in many a tribe of his own species—never has any change been seen in the characteristics of this ancient nation of sheep-dogs. Unchanged by time, by climate, by circumstance, they reign over the flock, vigilant, loyal, valorous, enduring—obedient, that they may rule—schooled and disciplined that they may restore order among a panic-given people—putting their trust in man, as men do put their trust in God. No wonder that old Smallbone, as we passed, should say to Ben, “He *be* a don, thy dog, Ben.” And no wonder that Ben should explain, with all the pride of possession, that the shepherds had nick-named Help, “the Don of the Downs.”

We were getting on the hills again, for the cry and hubbub behind us was grown fainter, and, as we once more found ourselves alone, Ben became communicative indeed. He talked more about himself than he had done since that night of the holocaust. It

appeared that his elder brother Dan, always of a wild roving disposition, actually had, as the neighbours said, joined the gipsies. He had married, and, for a gipsy, was well to do—that is, he had a good Guildford-built van, a shaggy mare, and two donkeys. For reasons best known to himself, he never paid a visit to his relations at Water-Stokeley, though it was on the high-road to a biennial fair which he regularly attended, and though it offered in the Chalk Pit such a handy spot in which to put up, should he have desired to inquire after his family, or to pay his respects to his mother. But Dan had never done this ; he had neither presented his bride, his residence, his stock, nor his chattels for the maternal inspection or blessing. Dan was erratic—indeed, it appeared marvellous that he condescended to the effeminacy of a bed, with real blankets upon it, and further protected by being set up in the head of his van ; but this was probably owing to the more luxurious habits of *Mrs.* Dan Boswel—Iwe beg that lady's pardon—*Mrs.* Britannia

Boswell. Dan had married into a very good family, gipsily considered—that of the Surreddges—but, as Ben took care to state, “Not so old as the Boswells, for the Surreddges has only been two hundred years a family.”

Dan, having formed this respectable, but, to judge from Ben’s statement, somewhat humble alliance—trebly bound now by the birth of two children, Shadrach and Greenleaf, was still not unmindful of home ties—loosened, but not forgotten. He often saw Ben, and from him got all the news that he wanted, without, as he said, “any putting about of the old lady.”

It was congenial to Dan’s wild, unfettered nature to make his call, as he passed, out on the Downs—untrammelled by inquisitorial gaze, he could there converse with Ben in his own tongue, upon his native ground, and among his own people. Here, then, Dan used to pay his visits, and though, after the manner of his race, they were flying ones, they were yet made comparatively often ; as

on occasion, if he were in good time for the next fair, he would prolong his stay over two or three days.

This system had its advantages, for whatever Down Ben happened to be on, there Dan could pitch his camp.

It may appear somewhat strange and improbable that the inhabitants of Water-Stokeley, or as Mr. Dan preferred to call them, "They Stokers," had never discovered this fraternal arrangement, but so it was—and of the few who crossed the Downs, fewer there were who could have interpreted at home what they might have chanced to behold from a distance. Be it as it may, Water-Stokeley, notorious as it was for knotty and intricate tales of scandal about everybody—from the churchwardens to the church-mice—from the Master of the Meet to his meanest maidservant—from the worthy landlord of the "Checquers" to the stranger within his gates—had never, in scouring over the secrets of the shire, happened to turn its sleepless eyes or sanatorial nostrils in the

direction of the ever-moving house of Dan Boswell. But Ben had told us all this about his brother, and his brother's habits and arrangements, nomadic and domiciliary, when it struck him that he had forgotten to mention this particular—that Britannia's sister, the beautiful Ashena, lived, or rather we would say, moved with them—Ashena, the talk of the tribes from Surrey heaths to Derby highlands — Ashena, admired by mother-hags with traditional time-scars and fossil bones—Ashena, beloved by moody men with smouldering visages — Ashena, the talisman of Shepherd Ben.

Perhaps it was the *gaucheness* of the sudden surprise, the not knowing exactly what to say, that tempted us to ask if she had given him any pledge, any love-token ; but the rebuke was justly administered in the artless innocent reply of Ben, who answered, " Yes, sir, ' Ashena.' "

These Downs, these arid, open, lonely Downs, with their wind-blown scrolls of history, their traditions of lost literature,

their blood-stained pages of battle and event and change of rule, their folk-lore, their commerce, their Psalms in the sighing air, their Chronicles in the scattered groves, their Books of Kings in the rounded Barrows, had also a Song of Songs to complete the Book, and to add the sixth day's work to the created microcosm.

Ben's words were true indeed when he said, "There be plenty o' things a-stirrin' on the Downs." Often, looking down the far-stretching Ridgeway and over the undulating lonely vista, had we, gazing on the sight so often called "nothing in sight," seen the idyl of the earth, the panorama of a world, stretched out, with its toiling, striving, sleeping, but yet, as *we* thought, without its human love. Not here was the haunt of love, not on these solitary ridges, nor in these hollow valleys, the charnels of forgotten memories.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE GATHERING OF THE SHEPHERDS.

FOR more than a century (during which time the ovine population on the Downs has trebled itself) the Mawkin-Tree Farm has been the scene of a certain half-yearly meeting. The venerable Mawkin-Tree Farm—crouching in a hollow on the Middle Down, surrounded by a village of out-buildings and distinguished by its long barn, centrally placed among the sheep walks and convenient in its accommodation—it has been the chosen rendezvous of shepherds twice a year for more than a hundred years. Undisturbed by falling Funds or city panic, by revolution, foreign war, threatened invasion or home riots, uninfluenced by collapse in Cabinet or camp or counting-



house, this Gathering of the Shepherds has been held at the lone farm on the Downs.

Here, each spring and fall, have congregated the shepherds and their junior partners, the dogs, from off neighbouring hills, bringing with them the stragglers which during the past six months have strayed from one flock to another.

Never since its foundation has this custom been relinquished, and at each meeting have the strayed ones, almost without exception, gone home in the guardianship of their rightful owners—in most instances the chief witness to identification for the plaintiff, being the rough-coated colley-dog.

It was a white autumn morning in early November when Ben set out from the Place Farm, with Help and three truant ewes. As darkness lifted, it only changed the veil from a black to a white one. Every hedge was hidden in the chilling white mist. Fortunately for aching finger-tips, the ewes shewed a disposition to hurry. As the sheep drove along, displaying a peculiar

wagging motion, they became magnified in the mist, and might have passed for three night-fiends who had lost their way, and who were being driven back again to their solitary haunts. As the Downs were reached and we got upon the Ridgeway, the sun appeared couched in mist, but even here the sky seemed to be the nearest thing in sight.

The road lay through Hillsley, and as we descended into the dip, and up again on the other side, the contrast was striking. To-day the village was silent and motionless, and in its sleep looked larger than usual. If closed doors and drawn curtains told anything, even the little inns were still asleep. The sun was now well up, but these folk appeared not to be influenced by sun-risings and sun-settings. This was bedtime, season of midmost sleep; disturb them not, they will awake, and be up and doing before Fair-time, a fortnight hence.

The three woolly Graces, who have shewn a disposition to wander, from their birth upwards, now shew a disposition to loiter, to

bolt up any entry, to double, indeed, to do anything except what we want them to do. But Help is vigilant; and when we are once more upon the Downs, and the wild creatures stampede in three directions at once, Help—with a faculty which, described from ocular evidence only, might be termed trisection—quickly reforms the recreant squad, and having established his supremacy by this signal victory, matters go along easily for the rest of the distance. One of the ewes is marked, but Ben has failed to recognise it; it has therefore very probably strayed from a great distance through several flocks. The other two, more agile and artful, have already effectually obliterated their marks of identification before starting on their travels, but one is a “Bagshot,” and the other an “old Berkshire”—a rare breed, and seldom seen hereabouts nowadays, and Ben guesses at their owners.

But we are nearing our destination, and the Long Barn is already in sight. The great doors are open and around them are

standing a crowd of brown-garmented men. The benignant sun has lifted himself by a lazy mid-day effort into the blue arena above us, and only distant Downs are still hidden in the hovering moisture. As we descend into the bottom, we get a pictorial display in a bird's eye view of two shepherds, one apparently reclining upon nothing, leans back at an angle of forty-five degrees, contemplating two sheep in front of him, which appear to be all back and hind quarters, and which perform retrograde movements in a jerky fashion towards a barking dog. The other is nearer to us, and we can hear him shouting to his dog, as that faithful ally endeavours to control the parabolic curves which a swift-footed short-wool is describing. Most of the shepherds have already arrived and are conversing with their old friends. Ben and Help see their charges after a little difficulty triumphantly added to the other renegades in a corner of the stack-yard, which has been hurdled off for the occasion. Some of the truants are bleating

piteously, while others are enjoying in silence the turnips and hay which have been thrown in among them. Farmer Reid is moving about his stackyard, and has already in courtly old English fashion invited us to partake of the dinner, and to join in the proceedings. Ben, who has already counted the lost sheep, says "there's five score, less one—better by half a score than last gathering."

Looking at this pen—this haven on the Middle Down—with the ninety and nine lost sheep, the parable grows full of meaning—and the oft-quoted words come with double weight, now that we repeat them ourselves, saying, "All we like sheep have gone astray," and we pray for the divinely-human mercy of the Good Shepherd.

But the dinner is ready, and Farmer Reid leads the way into the barn. The fine old farmer sits at the head of the table, and presides for the fiftieth time at this homely banquet. Seventy shepherds are taking their places at the board, and seventy dogs are

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lying between their feet or foraging about the barn. Surely the poor barn-rats must have a biennially hard time of it, when this dreaded canine invasion takes place. Some of the dogs go straight up to certain crevices and holes in the rafters, with a determination that denotes former acquaintance.

The great haunches of mutton steam from beneath their caper-sauce mantles, while boiled turnips and potatoes raise a cloud from their several earthen craters.

But all the heads are uncovering, and oh, what a sight! a grey line of glory, broken only at intervals, encircles the board—white locks which have weathered the winter and the bitter blast for years and years upon the bleak high lands. But grace is finished, and the Sacred Revelation is covered again. The mutton goes well, and jaws are heard to snap *under* as well as *above* the table. The talk increases, and now, with the advent of a dozen long suet-puddings, laughter and joking begin to be heard. There are very few young men present—Ben is the youngest.

It is the gathering of the veterans. Farmer Reid only remembers one other president at this feast, and that was his father, and he tells us with conscious family pride, that "he's only a-saying what *his* father used to say before him," on like occasions; and adds, "No man's ridden harder to hounds than I have, and do now, but I like this gathering better nor ever a hunt-breakfast—good as that be in its way."

The puddings are demolished, and now comes the monster cheese, and a fresh stoup of old Berkshire ale.

While this is being served, Farmer Reid explains to us that it is customary to have one or two songs before rising for business, or as the hearty old gentleman puts it "just while the victuals are sorting 'emselfes a bit." Farmer Reid rises and asks who will sing? There is a little commotion at the end of the table, and, after a pause, an old man gets up, doffs his hat, and gives us a broad west-country version of the "Leather Bottl." The chorus is well known to all present, and

as the last words of each verse are drawled out, the echo lingers among the tye-beams with a strange and mournful effect.

Old Smallbone of Staddlestone Down rises next; and as his white locks tumble out of his hat, and his rugged face is seen softened and mellowed in its silver setting, one is filled with reverence for this venerable relic of the years, the face that has fronted every weather, the figure that slowly bows now towards a day of eternal rest. With a clear deep voice, well exercised upon the windy sheep-walk, he begins,

THE FARMER'S BOY.

"The sun had set behind yon hills,  
Across yon dreary moor,  
Weary and lame, a boy there came  
Up to a farmer's door.  
'Can you tell me, if any there be  
That will give me employ,  
To plough and sow and reap and mow,  
And be a farmer's boy?'"

The shepherds all join in this chorus, the words of which they learned as boys. After



this there are calls for young Ben ; and Ben, rising from beside old Smallbone, commences the ballad of

THE BARREL OF BERKSHIRE ALE.

Three shepherds sat once on the side of a down,  
Their faces were red, and their smocks they were brown.  
Now hearken awhile, and I'll tell to you here,  
What hapt to these shepherds for stealing of beer.  
Now the weather 'twas warm, and the sun he was  
high.

Says Job, " Look'ee here, we be thirsty an' dry,  
We may see from this Down right away to the Vale,  
But never a house for a pint o' fower ale.

" Now Lowesley the carter has more nor his share,  
An' he's locked up, an' gone to the Hillsley fair,  
He's a cask in his kitchen, an' Jerry an' me  
Could fetch it betwixt us for the use o' we three.

" Luke Lowesley he's stingy an' well-to-do,  
While we be poor folk, and be thirsty too.  
He'll never find out, for we'll bury the beer  
Underneath them stones, in the bottom near."

Says Jerry, " Go fetch it 'fore Luke's back from town,  
While I'll wait with the dogs upon Cold-kitchen  
Down.

When you're gone, in the bottom, where bumble-bee  
drones,  
I'll move a smart few o' them Seven-Barrow Stones."

So they two they went off to the cottage so lone,  
While Jerry kept back old Snarler and Roan.  
Then he worked at the stones, did this wicked Jerree,  
Then waited an hour, more or less, as might be.

By the sun overhead it was just on high noon,  
When the dogs they began for to set up a tune,  
And Jason an' Job cum over the brow,  
With the barrel between 'em slung under a bough.

Their smocks they were brown, and their faces were  
red,

And as they cum near, Jason spoke, an' he said,  
Says he, "Jerry, my man," mid the barkin' and din,—  
"It bëant beer arter all, it be g—g—g—gin!"

Then these three wicked shepherds, they sat them a-  
down,

Their faces were red, an' their smocks they were brown;  
They drank till the sun had left Cold-kitchen Hill,  
An' they drank, an' they drank, till all was still.

Now three days went by, when Nip, Snarler, and  
Roan,

All lathered with sweat, an' jaws drippin' with foam,  
Cum into the yard of the Stone-Barrow Farm,  
An' set up the Devil's own howl an' alarm.

Out run the stout farmer, an' calls to his men,  
"Why, dom them three shepherds, there's death in the  
pen!"

Come Thatcher, come Carter, come Lomax and Lee,  
Come, all of you haste for to see what this be!"

Then this farmer stout with his men by his side,  
Set out for his pens on the lone hill-side.  
An' the dogs led the way, with pitiful howls,—  
Lord, have mercy upon 'em, poor sorrowful sows!

But when the stout farmer cum up to the stones,  
He stood, an' turned pale, an' he shook in his bones,  
For them three wicked shepherds lay out on the down,  
An' their faces were black, an' their smocks they were brown.

An' a huge carrion crow rose up from each head,  
Flapped his coal-coloured wings, an' cawed, "*Dead,  
dead, dead!*"

While the barrel betwixt 'em told plainly the tale  
Of these three wicked shepherds who went stealing of ale.

But harken awhile ; all this as I tell,  
In the time o' my grandfayther's fayther befel,  
But o' nights, on the Downs where the Leicesters lay,  
The shepherds oft see in the monlight, they say,  
The three shepherds crawl over the misty Down,  
Their faces are black, an' their smocks they are brown,  
An' they plough with a barrel, three in a line,  
While the Devil keeps goadin' an' guidin' the shine.

#### MORAL.

Now all you young shepherds as hear my song,  
Watch over your sheep, both short wools an' long ;  
Take a warning an' moral from Ben Boswell his tale,  
An' remember the Barrel o' Barkshier Ale.

This song is received with much acclamation, though several of the shepherds remark "as they don't call to mind having 'eared that song afore." Smallbone smiles, and says to those in front of him, "*We've* 'eared it afore, us up on Cold-kitchen Down, 'asn't us, Ben?" Ben, however, is occupied in emptying a horn of old Berkshire ale.

But it is time to commence the business for which they have met, and many of the shepherds have a dozen miles and more to trudge before they reach home. Farmer Reid rises, and the banquet of the smocks is over. As the men get up there is a scuffling underneath the table, and the dogs come trooping out in the greatest excitement. The master moves forward to the rick-yard, we are going to draw the cover. We have a select field, but what a pack this five-and-thirty couple makes! They need no whippers-in, they are out every day in the week. They are moving forward, and, closing together, make for the rick-yard in a body, the shepherds following, wiping their

mouths with red pocket-handkerchiefs—or their sleeves.

As the sheep were let out into the yard, each one was held and examined by the shepherds, who failing to identify them, passed them on to others. But often, while a little knot of men were deliberating over half-obliterated marks or other distinguishing characteristics, a dog would suddenly settle the decision by charging at the sheep, barking and otherwise proving beyond doubt his recognition of an old acquaintance. It was an interesting fact that while the shepherds who had mingled with sheep all their days, often hesitated as to the ownership of a truant, the dogs were never seen to waver in their opinion, nor did ever two dogs lay claim to the same sheep. While a doubtful claim was being asserted or defended, a rush from a dog, and a bark as he seized the sheep by the shoulder, was considered an equitable charging; the human jury stood by, contented to deliver their verdict at the direction of the four-footed judge.

In the course of an hour, the just administration of the strays to their rightful owners was completed, with the exception of two Bagshot ewes, which after having been passed round more than once, in view of the keen old eyes of the men, and the keener, surer eyes of their dogs, being still unclaimed, became, according to custom, the property of Farmer Reid.

And now it was time for the shepherds to lead home their charges. Many had more than a dozen miles to tramp over the Downs, and were already preparing for the journey, by producing pieces of cord wherewith to somewhat restrain the erratic movements of the wild and wanton ewes. Old Smallbone had singled out three of his master's sheep from the flock, and was toiling up the hill, the shadow of the little convoy leading the way. Ben was fortunate in having no missing ones this time; and we were soon looking down once more upon the now distant Mawkin-Tree Farm. A level light lay along the high table-lands, and as we

crossed them, we overtook the Shepherd-Mentor, looking like some pilgrim-saint as he crawled slowly onward. The old man's thoughts were running on the past; and as we joined him, he said, as if in continuation of some previous reflection: "Yes, Maister Ben, it's a smart few ship as I've brought home time in an' out from the Mawkin-Tree —'t 'ud make a tidy flock o' all sorts, I reckon. But I bëant so lightsome as I war, an' I 'as to rest me on the road, now-a-days."

Remarking to Smallbone that it was a long journey without company, he replied, out of the experience of more than half a century, "Looke, sir, you be never without company when you be a-larnin'; yer larns a little orf yer neighbours, an' ye 're allus a-larnin' when ye 're by yerself: so yer never be without company, as yer might say—leastways, times is never tidious with me." An almost imperceptible sigh overhead causes Smallbone to look up. His practised eye discerns in the flock of emigrants a mixed migration.

“There, zur, it bëant ships only as 'as their gatherings. These be late fo' leavin', these be, but yer see *they* has their proper shepherd for to fold them, as they stray, an' they joins together up on these Downs, some o' all sorts, an' so *they* gets home at last, along o' the others.”

As we pass a white stone, lying on the open plain, Smallbone tells us of a day, now so long ago, that his father was resting with him, teaching the child his first lesson in minding sheep, when a cloud appeared on the edge of the Downs, away there in the east, and as it grew larger, it changed into a regiment, marching on its way back from “beating Boney”; and how, as the men saw the plain stretched out before them, the likeness to the late-won battle-plain took hold of each, and how with a great cry they shouted, “Waterloo! Waterloo!”

With such talk does the veteran shepherd beguile the time, as the *cortège* creeps across the Long Ridge. There we bid farewell to Smallbone, who leaves us, getting smaller,



and smaller, as he nears the "Shepherd's Rest," until he disappears at last, with a final wave of his red handkerchief, round the green hemisphere, bound with the great slanting band of shadow. And, as he is lost to view, the letters cut in the turf near the summit stand forth, lit up by the afternoon sunset, marking the place where the other great-hearted shepherd Faithful takes his rest.

The prospect grew larger, and more lovely as we thought of Ben, "Young Ben," and then of the time when Smallbone would round the hill, and giving the farewell signal return no more; when we should ask of young Ben, and he should answer, "He is not here!" But though they are now separated by the untrodden Downs and sheepwalks of the All-Unknown, it was not to be by this manner. Old Smallbone still turns back as he rounds the hill, and raises the farewell signal, though he waves his weather-worn hand somewhat wearily nowadays.

On the way home, Ben recounted many an

interesting episode in the life of Smallbone, and told of the time when, exchanging the crook for the spade, he dug the grave of the dead shepherd, and then using his spade as a pen, wrote with it on the open hillside the one word "Faithful," for a lasting history of his friend.

The sun was crouching lower beneath a poising hawk that hung motionless above him, and as we got upon the "Homing" Downs, Hawkridge had already drawn his night-cloak half over his long grey back. Ben, whose clock-tower was the chalk hill, and his clock-hands the long shadows that march across its dial, spoke somewhat regretfully of the days that draw in so quickly at Christmas, but added—not caring to translate the undercurrent of his thoughts—"Dan 'll cross the downs in a day or two on his way to Newbury Fair." And at the thought of his expected visitors, Ben's brown face turned unconsciously to receive the last flush of the half-sun, as the rim sank behind a knoll on the purple ridge; the waiting

hawk stooped, and a little black speck dropped out of the sky on to the place already dim in the departing afterglow.

As we neared the Cold Oak, a thin blue line of smoke wavered upward from a hollow hard by; and Help with his nose in the air, suddenly changed his gait from its usual monotonous swing when on the march, to a lively movement, executed chiefly upon his toes. Ben looked up and said very quietly, "That's Dan." In a few moments after, we began the descent; a fire appeared, and then a van and figures, and then a hastily-uttered tirade delivered from the mouth of some uncouth mongrel. Help did not choose to reply, and as we approached the camp, a figure—Ben's double, in a crumpled, high white hat—appeared. After an informal introduction, we walked towards the fire, escorted by the proprietor of the settlement. Dan might be described as a jovial edition of Ben—his face, his features, his speech, were striking by their likeness; but his demonstrative and rollicking manner

was in its nature and contrast, almost foreign. Dan's hat doubtless had a good deal of wear in it yet, but from the canister-like indentations that crossed and re-crossed its white surface, it might have been worn, or rattled, or taken round at every fair held in the kingdom during the last five-and-twenty years. The collar and sleeves of Dan's coat reminded one of the attire of a Parliamentary Whig of the Reform-Bill Era; the sleeves fitted his long thin arms somewhat closer than stockings, but, by way of compensation, the pockets were large and full; they were now empty and loose, but they looked capable of carrying enough provisions for a tramp from Norwood to John o' Groats.

Dan's thin legs were bound in corduroy gaiters, which matched his sleeves in closeness of fit, and gave him a highly agile appearance. From one of his pockets appeared a ground-ash plant, whose roots might fairly be inferred to be growing—potted, so to speak, in this capacious receptacle—for,

erecting itself behind Dan's back, it ultimately ended in a tuft of three or four green leaves, which curled over his shoulder, and looked him in the face. But we were now within the precincts of the camp, and Help, running on in front, was greeted by two wild-looking brown objects seated beside the fire, singing a ditty to a swinging cauldron. A volley of unintelligible jargon came out of the half-door of the yellow van, and immediately afterwards, Mrs. Britannia Boswell appeared. As that lady descended the steps leading from the state apartment (which constituted at once bed-chamber, sitting-room, and treasury), to the Hall of Audience, though she bore in her hand nothing nobler than a frying-pan for a sceptre, this did not detract from the queenliness of her figure. She stepped down from her cloudy throne to the earth of common mortals, and greeting Ben, inquired who the Gorgio might be. On being informed, she received us with all the graciousness which a sovereign accords to a distinguished foreigner visiting his court.

Britannia bowed towards the Gorgio with a state becoming the royal responsibility necessitated by the belief that the downs were her own by right of ancient possession, and that she was once more visiting her domains. Her consort Dan was still more affable, and condescended to smoke a calumet filled from our tobacco pouch.

Ben conversed with Britannia in a language of which no one probably has the dictionary; while Dan informed us that he had seen us crossing the Hawkridge in the morning, on our way to Hillsley. Ben said that he had been to the Mawkin Farm, and was proceeding to explain its position, when Britannia, anxious not to be thought ignorant of the remotest corner of her dominions, interrupted him by exclaiming, that she "knew the Mawkin Farm as well as she knew her own name, Britannyer;" while her spouse added, as further corroboration, "'eaps o' poultry they keeps at Mawkins."

At the instant, the four leaves shook their little sides, and Dan thrust his hands

into his capacious pockets, with a sound like a laugh—but this was probably a coincidence.

“ Well, yer be early fo’ Newb’ry, this time, brother Dan,” said Ben, with a vacant look into the gathering darkness.

“ You’re right, Ben ; I did well at Wantage—sold a foal o’ that ole spavined mare—wouldn’t ’ave knowed ’er, arter she cum out of the Surrey country ; so I cum away early.”

- Then the rascal laughed again, but looking for a sympathetic smile from Ben, saw that his face was dark and grave as a prophet’s. Britannia was not to be hindered in her domestic duties even by the presence of a distinguished foreigner, and informed us of her intention to “warm up the fry.” As she moved off with her frying-pan, a low thud in the proximity of Shadrack raised a doubt as to whether the performance was to be of a culinary or a disciplinary nature. It promised to be both—for the frying-pan appeared the next moment upon the fire, replacing the

dethroned cauldron, which now sent forth its savoury vapour on the night air, making it suspiciously redolent—as is a broth made from the bones of those winged creatures that fly beneath the one great name of *Game*.

Help, who had been sitting near the fire warming himself, turned his head more than once wistfully in the direction of the cauldron, and then suddenly rising up from his shaggy haunches, ambled off into the darkness. He reappeared almost immediately, and there, full in the firelight, stood out—it could be no other—Ashena. Ben's eloquence had not prepared us for this surprise. As she halted behind the fire, silent and motionless as a carven image, the flames photographed her features on our mind, and the negative will remain there for ever. Her deep-set flashing eyes, lit by the lurid light, gave her an appearance almost supernatural; while the flames, throwing her figure slightly out of focus, made one wonder if this might not be an ocular illusion. But it was no illusion—she advanced, and laying down



a bundle of faggots, came into full view. Help was jumping round her in a state of joyful ecstasy, and as he bounded against her high-set hips, the suppleness and grace of her figure became apparent. She appeared as surprised as we were, and though Britannia was telling her in Rommany, she looked the while at Ben, as if for the explanation. Ben said something to her, which caused her to turn to us, saying, "Ashena knows the gentleman already six months. It is he that makes pictures of the strong tree, and Ben and Help."

An answer to this complimentary but embarrassing comment is rendered unnecessary by Dan's remarking on the general excellence of our tobacco, and inquiring if it is "Lunnon mixture." Ben then assists Ashena to hobble and set loose two donkeys, which are tied up at the tail of the van, for which he is rewarded with a draught of asses' milk. Ashena disappears within the recesses of the van; and Dan, with ironical gravity, asks Ben, "How they Stokers are

getting on?" The two donkey-men converse; and Dan, as elder brother and man-of-the-world, chaffs Ben for "biding longer among the silly folk," while Ben's eyes, which had lighted up, suddenly lower again, and his dusky complexion darkens into moody gloom. Dan shews a new and formidable side of his nature—his teeth, and a curse is delivered on Water-Stokeley, long, low, and terrible. This brings the tawny-skinned Ashena to the van-door with a ringing and melodious laugh, as she claps her hands, and turns her bewitching eyes on poor Ben. She has done something to herself—it is that silken yellow kerchief on her head. The sibyl! The dusky witch trips gleefully down the steps, perfectly unaware, seemingly, of the grace of her shapely head, so well displayed by the close-drawn handkerchief, which falls behind in a point between her well-formed blade-bones. Looking at her healthy, hardy beauty, so well-formed and supple-limbed, it is a matter of strange surprise that her lodging is literally

“on the cold ground,” that her bed is but a heap of furze beneath a blanket, and under that kraal, against which she is standing, and which looks like a temporary dog-kennel. It is a relief, after seeing Ashena’s sleeping arrangements, or rather want of them, to find how little her physique betokens privation.

Ashena’s eyes have been attracted by a square gold coin at our watch-chain, and requesting to be allowed to handle it, she inquires, “What nation uses square money?” But Britannia reproves her ignorance by saying, “Why, the Chienies does, child.”

A somewhat more exact description of the coin excited the most eager and reverent interest ; to wit, that it belonged to a nation which conquered part of India a long while ago, before the First Great Day even, when the Small God was born out in the open, and warmed by the fire of ash-faggots. Ashena, beautiful in her grave solemnity, bends low, and kisses the coin. “We always has an ash-fire on the Great Day.

Dan and me goes an' gathers the wood together, for the ash told where the Small God lay; the Small God who wandered about like a Rommany. So we burns the ash every Great Day."

Ashena's speech is delivered with an impressive expression of reverence; and the dim light of religion in her eyes, dim and flickering and uncertain though it be, ennobles her beautiful face and perfect features.

But it is time to depart, that Ben may the more unconstrainedly discuss his projects and family affairs among his people. As we leave the interesting caravan, and plunge into the surrounding darkness, the way is enlivened for some distance by the strains of an old guitar, accompanying a sweet and plaintive song, sung by Ashena at the camp-fire.

That Ben had a good excuse for not affecting the society of the womenkind at churn suppers, was plain enough after this episode; but that Ben did not forsake shepherding in order to better himself, as Jabez

Lack had called it, or—with such an incentive as Ashena—had not cast in his lot with the gipsies, was not quite so easy to explain. That Dan desired to seduce Ben from the devious paths of sheepdom, was evident. That Ashena loved Ben with the wild lawless love which only wants and only thinks of total appropriation, was evident also. Ben himself was always silent on the subject; and the arguments of the demonstrative Dan had shewn Ben to us more reserved than ever. Perhaps a solution was easier to be found at the little half-cottage down at Water-Stokeley, where a helpless wreck, driven to and fro ever since her first voyage through a windy world, and beached at last, but only partially protected from disabling seas, was settling down gradually, and slowly going to pieces. There, broken and unfit for future service, with the red signal of distress flying from her care-worn eyes, and straining her little strength to provide the meagre comforts for her boy, the widow Boswell had asked Ben to “never leave her.”

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It was one spring-time, after the kindly village doctor from Stow-Maries had advised her removal to the infirmary, at least, as he said, for awhile, that her complication of disorders might have a chance of being more successfully treated. The widow Boswell had told him that she believed her illness to be incurable; and he had been obliged to own to her that there was very little chance of doing anything to permanently relieve her, but that she might be made more easy and comfortable by attention which she could not receive in a small draughty cottage. It was then that she had appealed to Ben, to "never leave her." When the kindly doctor had explained to Ben that the cottage was too draughty for an invalid, and that he was as badly off, and even worse, than if he had to do everything for himself, Ben only replied, "She's dried my clothes when I cum in out o' the wet, every night this ten year;" and immediately set to work to build up a partition across the room, and to paper over the cracks

with the pictures which the landlord of the Checquers had given him.

What were Ben's thoughts concerning the advantages to be derived from roaming from fair to fair, selling other people's horses, is a matter for conjecture only. What were his hopes with regard to the wandering but constant Ashena, was a topic discussed by these twain out on the quiet downs,

“When no one was nigh to hear,”

but Help and the white-woolled children of the hill; and is therefore no business of ours. What Ben *did* was to look after some thirty score of dependants on the hill-side, and one more helpless dependant that he kept hurdled out of harm's way at home, to whom he brought his nine shillings every Saturday-night—content, in fair weather, to loiter beside his flock, repeating folk-lore rhymes, and learning his alphabet out of the horn-book of Nature. Content, in rain and wind, to go his rounds, looking here, look-

ing there, listening for the fog-bound wetherbell, collecting the flock, counting his sheep, marshalling them within the well-set hurdles, and then in the sleety darkness marching home, wet through, worn out, and—unperceived. Ben's deep, sad, earnest eyes were the two bright guardians of the happiest-looking face in the village; never did *his* features relapse into the moody expression which Dan's rollicking manner at times failed to hide—though Dan's stomach was always full, and Dan's quiver (we mean his van) was replete with the living joys of married comfort. Ben lay awake of nights on his pallet, listening to the gusts, that did not wait to demand admittance, but entered with cold freebootery—smiting him on the face, or bursting down the wide chimney, disturbing even the sleeping swallows, and laughing at their querulous complaints; and then intruding into corner and cupboard, until their creaking tread at last awoke the cough in the inner room. Dan, if *he* was ever troubled by the minions of the wind, would



awake to no more pathetic sound than the hoarse supplication of the ghost of a horse, tethered hard-by the van, and could turn off to sleep again by the side of his hardy Britannia, lulled with the comforting remembrance of the file, and the bottle containing arsenic, and vitriol, and butter of antimony, in the drawer under the nuptial couch—a sleeping draught for Dan, but for the horse, a means whereby on the morrow that ghost should rise in glory, with coat glossy (or as Dan would put it, “slick”), with a new light in his jaded eye, with a tail betokening speed, rejoicing as a strong man to run a race, but, above all, fit and eager to deceive the confiding customer. But if Ben would rise on the morrow without the hope of making the best of a bad bargain, yet, at dawn, his sheep would get up, and shaking their woolly sides, push their noses through the hurdles, and look sunward for his cheering whistle.

The rainy season arrived, bringing floods on the water-meadows, lessening the fall

of water on the weirs, hiding the water-marks, and levelling all under one resistless march of water. The locks were closed, the rod-cyots obliterated; the mills, isolated and helpless, looked like huge white wrecks run aground and derelict. The banks and the river were so swollen as to be unrecognisable. The slippery slopes of the downs streamed with the down-pour of the steady rain. Through the valleys ran the winter-brooks, the white hill-water rushing down the new-made channels, scooping out a way with wildest fury; and then spent and out of breath, this rout of the rain-cloud was stayed, and deployed itself into a vast stationary lake, awaiting a long-delayed order to disband, and be at rest. Ben plodded past the chalk-pit and round by the toll-gate, like an old campaigner, beneath his great shepherd's cloak—his chest, too narrow for his height, broadened by the cape, which stood out like a gable from his shoulders.

Cold-Kitchen Down was too bleak and exposed for the sheep, and they had been

brought down to the head of the valley ; then the weather grew colder, and the last few days of the Old Year passed over the downs and the long Ridgeway in snowy silence. The summer grazing-grounds were too deep in snow for the sturdiest of sheep to scrape a way to the frozen grass. The flock was moved nearer home—some of the weaklier ones had already succumbed to the combined cold and wet.

Ben had not so far to walk, but there was still much to do. Home-grown hay had to be carried to the hungry sheep—hay that grew heavy with the weight of snow as he neared the fold. A four-days' snowstorm darkened the air, hiding hill and hollow, and permitting but the most limited view of bleating sheep. It stifled their cry, and the reassuring answer of the faithful Help, as he preceded his master—wading stomach-deep in snow like some hairy reptile.

It was terrible weather : Ben would often call to Help, only to assure himself that he was awake. He longed to lie down with

the dog beside him, and look lazily at the green fields which every now and then he thought he saw in the place of desolating snow; but the sheep must be seen to first, and their horrible human coughing roused him up once more to duty. He had never lost so many sheep before; each day he had to lift up a starveling upon its legs, and next day to lift it up again—but this time it could not stand unsupported, and the stiffened legs and contracted wool told the reason, without any need for a look at the glazed eye. Old Jabez Lack, the Union agent, getting drunk in the tap of the “Checquers,” had gone down street to the “Swan,” to better himself, and succeeding only too well, had started for home, but had been found on the Sunday-morning lying stiff and cold in the yielding snow, his half-closed eyes placidly contemplating an empty ginger-beer bottle which he still grasped with the grip of death. He lay where he had lost his way down by Oldley End, near to the river, and along the path which Dorothy had

taken on her last journey when the meadows were green. The snow was still descending in slow procession, myriads on myriads of the smallest flakes, which portend the deepest fall.

Ben, sorely weakened, rallied at his post. On the memorable Sunday-afternoon, the last Sunday of the Old Year, worn with the cruel cold, toiling through the tiring snow, and depressed with the vision of the pathetic faces of those he went to relieve, he felt a numbness begin to creep over him, a strange numbness he had never felt before. He thought himself slower than usual in plodding his way to the fold, and turned round to see whether he might not have missed the path; but in front were the faint tracks of his morning journey, and he continued his way till at last, after what appeared to him hours of striving, he gained the fold. Two more ewes had fallen since morning; he knew them both, for one bore a bell which lay stretched out from her neck, dumb as the tongue which hung from her frozen jaw. The other was a black-faced sheep which had

strayed from some other flock to his, the night before he led them off the downs, and which had become so tame as to run to him at his call. A whim had made him christen her "Ashena." She crouched so life-like, with her nose leaning on the hurdle, that Ben called two or three times; then he called more gently in the silence, and then went up to her; but she did not answer. The little light was going—Ben could hardly now see the cloud of steam that rose from Help's faithful jaws; he felt giddy and reeled, but righted himself, and now did not feel cold. The other sheep were eating their hay. He observed one pushing another away, then it grew dim as it passed its way along the flock—the sheep-bells seemed suddenly to sound farther off. He looked at his black-faced favourite—she moved and strove to shake herself and rise—then she was alive. He tried to shout, but he could hardly open his mouth; then he became suddenly terrified at the sight of two—two sheep, who both trembled. Ignorant of the

cause of the phenomena he was witnessing, he became frightened and raving. Now the whole flock had multiplied, and a hundred Helps ran towards him—but they ran over green fields, and farther, farther still, the horizon widened and lifted. Miles of undulating down, and a great red sun shone on the black-faced sheep—no, it was the tawny Ashena, beautiful and warm, and who said, “I come to you, darling;” but he lay on the down with old Help by his side, and he did not care to come. The dream was Death’s disguise which he threw over his shoulders ere he could crawl unrecognised upon the fallen shepherd, and choke the beating brain and heart with his victim’s own life-blood. Help was not to be deceived by the wary foe—rushing upon his prostrate master, he threw himself upon the almost lifeless body. He licked with his warm tongue the pallid features, scratched the insensate cheeks, hugged, growled, howled—howled louder, kicked, hugged, struggled, fighting with the precious mo-

ments—faster—faster still, and at last shook open his master's eyes; they tried to close again with a faint attempt at a smile, but Help had a good hold now, and with a savage bay that turned off into the most appealing supplication, he renewed his kicking, he boxed the now bleeding cheeks, and stopping a brief moment to lick the wounds, he set up one great cry of triumph, as his master again opened his eyes, moved, lifted his arms, rose up, bloody and torn, but saved. The widow Boswell screamed, when, hearing Help's barking and scratching, she opened the door and beheld Ben with yellow face smeared with dark blood-stains—a tottering ghoul, trying to smile, that staggered in, and then fell forward, nearly knocking her down, but breaking his fall by a heavy thud on the luckless back of poor Help. The mother dragged in Ben's legs, shut the door, and fainted.

The New Year chimes rang out over a white and silent world. The storm of Sunday was over. The land lay sleeping



beneath its snowy coverlet, and a round moon rose up and blessed it. The snow, lodging upon the trembling belfry towers, fell down at the clamorous commands of the iron mouths. The New Year, waiting on top of What-Call Hill, saw the dim shape of the departing pilgrim slowly sail down the river on a raft of floating ice, groaning as he grazed the pins of the wooden piers, and then hurrying on at a rapid pace, swiftly disappear in the shadowy silence. He stood a moment and sighed, and behind him the great beeches all clothed in white swung gently to and fro, shaking down a forest of snow-leaves that fell around like silent spectres of their summer fruit and flower. "Ah," said the New Year; "I must wait till this time twelve months before I shall have time to think;" so he moved down What-Call Hill, bringing down after him great snow-drifts, that were found in the morning blocking up the high-road that ran round the foot. At the great house the supper-waltz was stopped, and the squire's children

trooped like a crowd of summer butterflies to the hall-door to greet the bell, and throw kisses at the New Year, who they implicitly believed would enter there on his way to this world. A double line was formed, and sure enough—with a cold air that rattled the evergreens round the swing-lamps, and to the bell-song of ding-dong, ding-dong—a shrouded figure, whose face they could not see, leaped out of the darkness, and skipping down the hall, disappeared through the servants' wing. A rush through the servants' hall and into the great kitchen disclosed an open door, but not the stratagem of the kindly squire.

At the Rectory, the parson said to his wife, "Why there are the bells ringing a Happy New Year to you, Jocosia. I understand that young Boswell, the shepherd, is ill. He never comes to church, but will you see that we send him a bottle of port-wine, my dear?"

In Jabez Lack's cottage, the bells sounded blurred and sadly out of tune, indeed, though

Jabez was fast asleep beneath a sheet that defined the points of his nose and chin—yet the jarring sound in that chamber conveyed the idea that even in this deep sleep, the bells set old Jabez's teeth on edge. Next door, though the widow Boswell had not even thought of a New Year, yet she heard the bells plainly enough, and they sounded peaceful and full of rest, when Ben took her hand and whispered to her, "'Ear them beautiful sheep-bells, mother!"

The New Year was a week old. It was the afternoon of "Plough Monday," or, as old Mrs. Lack, the laundress, always called it, "Saint Distaff's Day," because, as that hard-working body used to say, "When she was a girl, them as warn't sluts nor hussies, took to their distaff agen." Water-Stokeley was in-doors upon this afternoon. The grim earl's gentle wife might have ridden up and down its hilly street, unseen and unheard, on this afternoon of S. Distaff's Day. The snow lay white, and would have kept the secret of her horse's soundless

tread. Even the "cunning eyes" of spouts were closed with icy seals. Certainly the windows had not yet shut their eyelids, for it was but four o'clock; but King Frost had scratched with his diamond ring a myriad cabalistic characters over each pane, rendering it as opaque as the *membranae mitilantes* of the old belfry owls. The great snow-drifts crouched under every wall, and thatched every cottage and out-house with a quilt of eider-down. From the gables of the great house it had slipped with a muffled thud, and crouched beneath the mullions, leaving the gables blue and naked in the cold. The mills were stopped, and the white drums, surrounded with long-armed icicles, looked like huge frozen krakens. At the toll-house, in the middle of the bridge, sat the old hay-toll mistress, trying to warm her wizen face, and holding, with long withered arms, her day's tribute—seven pennies. It was a silent afternoon—every one within his ark—not even a bird of promise to be seen sallying forth. Looking

around on this apparent great stand-still of Nature and her children, one became oppressed with a sense of the awful strength of Time. Loneliness and Silence were his two chronometric watchmen that stalked unseen, calling out each past moment in the frosty air.

The lock-house was deserted : the last time Bill Trinder visited it, was in a boat a fortnight ago, when he went to fetch his few valuables away.

The half-submerged lock-beams, like four wakeful alligators, raised their noses out of the flood, eyeing the four quarters of the wind. The water-meadows were clad in a broad cuirass of ice. In mid-stream a procession of trunks of trees and *débris* of broken river-paddles floated slowly down, suggesting the idea, as they revolved, or turned, or moved near, that some of them might after all prove to be the corpses they so much resembled. As the twilight deepened, a land-blown moody sea-gull solemnly sailed up the river, following the bends in his lonely flight,

until he disappeared into the oncoming darkness.

The widow Boswell's cottage looked as deep asleep as the bee-pot in her back garden. The snow in front of her door was somewhat beaten down. In the waning light one could see, by stooping, the prints of hob-nails leading up to the entrance, but there were no prints of animals' feet to be seen. The view up the road was desolate in the extreme—a snowy sky, a beaten path, a snow-drift under the hedge, and then a grey void.

A strange circle of yellow light appeared on the snow in the distance moving towards the village; then the yellow light rose and stood against the hedge like a wheel. Then the dim light grew larger, and a nucleus of brighter light shone from the axle; now the spokes were delineated in yellow rays, and a moment after discovered a great barn-lantern carried by a cloaked figure. It tapped gently at the door of the widow Boswell, which was opened and the figure entered. Inside, when the cloak had been carefully

drawn off and hung on the nail behind the door, the figure was easily seen, even by the unsteady flare of a single rush-light to be that of the shepherd Smallbone.

The first thing one noticed on entering was a gigantic shadow that shivered on the ceiling—ominous by its sheer size, it was rendered the more grotesque by the contortions which it received in its passage over two great beams that ran across from side to side of the cottage. But even in one brief glance the features could not be any way mistaken, and made one hurriedly turn to look for the reality.

Round the iron-dogs, there was a red glow that travelled far up the wide-mouthed chimney, but between the shadow and the glow was the half-reclining figure of Ben Boswell. Only Smallbone's back was to be seen as he went up and stood over him in silence. What appeared to be a skin of some description, partially thrown over the lower half of Ben's body, was Help, who took not the slightest notice of the entrance of Small-

bone. As one became accustomed to the stillness in the room, a hoarse, hurried, wheezing sound made itself heard. It was continuous ; it was not like the wind struggling through a crevice—the sound was a tidal one, and the tides ebbed and flowed in rapid succession, about every second. As Smallbone moved on one side, the sound came louder, but it was more localised, and one look at Ben's heaving chest tracked it down in a moment. Seven days had finished the work, which a month's exposure had begun. Help, who could ward off the onslaught of Death at the sheep-fold, could not stay the subtler march which the foe had stolen here into the cottage. Ben's almost motionless head and limbs, which, when they moved at all, moved tardily and wearily, afforded a strange contrast to the heaving, wrestling chest, rising and falling with such monotonous yet terrible haste. His mouth was open, but he did not speak ; his eyes stared, but they did not see ; his nostrils strained for air which he could not breathe. Raised up



to meet the precious air, Ben yet could not draw in enough to give himself ease; so the battle for breath went on. Smallbone beside him appeared not to be breathing at all—so quietly did he stand. The widow Boswell was so very silent also, that to a fresh observer the undistinguishable heap of clothing beside Ben's bed might easily have escaped notice altogether. The unendurable silence was broken at last by old Smallbone. "Thee and me 'ull be at next Spring-gathering together, us 'ull sit side by side at the Feast." At the mention of the Gathering, Ben rallied and tried to reply. He understood what was said, and with painful efforts he gurgled out, "You'll bring with 'ee the lost ewes, but not at Spring-gathering." Smallbone did not understand him. "I means the big Gathering, Ben, the Gathering as the Master calls, what Faithful serves." Ben repeated, "Bring the lost ewes when yer comes." Smallbone looked sad and puzzled and said aloud to himself "the poor lad's wandering, he's foreshadowed and

doän't know me." But Ben's hand at that moment gave the denial sign which his lips could not utter. As he lay propped up he did not close his eyes, and the glow from the red embers touched the large pupils, but they did not respond to the flickering.

His face began to look calmer, but his chest wrestled unceasingly for the hard-won respiration. He appeared to smile as he gasped, "There's stars to go home by." Smallbone rose and looked up the cavernous throat of the great chimney, and his rugged face bent near to Ben's. "You be right, Ben, you allus was weather-knowin'."

"There's the Plough up the ole chimney an' Jack on the middle horse," Ben said again in a gasping whisper; "yes, there's stars to go home by. Mother, I'll try to bide for ye—make haste." But the widow Boswell did not answer her son, nor did she move, nor give any sign.

Smallbone whispered something very near to Ben's ear, and Ben replied, "Bring the lost ewe—bring Ashena."

The old man looked perplexedly towards the widow, but he could not see her face. Then he turned appealingly to Ben : "Tell I, Ben, do 'ee tell I, what ewe be ye talkin' about ? I'll go to her for ye : be she bidin' ower at the Mawkin-tree, or in the South Downs ? Where dy'e say as ye've seen her ? Seen her where, Ben ?" But Ben only gasped, "Ashena."

Help gave a low growl. Some one was thumping at the door. Help gathered himself closer to his master, leaving the old shepherd to attend to the intruder. A stream of cold air struck the flame of the low-burning rush, and caused it to flutter like a flag in a stiff sailing-breeze, while a voice from outside was heard saying, "If yer please, Mr. Lagland said as I was to bring this bottle o' port-wine." The flickering tongue of the rush, which had emphasised each word, was quiet again as old Smallbone with a grim expression on his rugged face, stood the black bottle erect upon the table, like a monumental mark, and then returned to the side of Ben.

The widow Boswell seemed contented to lie by Ben's head, buried unrecognisably beneath a heap of clothes. Help appeared the most watchful, for he never for a moment took his great serious eyes off his master's face, noticing and knowing the portent of the changing changes, but not vexing the troubled room with any cry. That one low growl was the only sign he had given, beyond the blinking of his faithful eyes, whenever the stertorous, strident effort took on some new phase. He nestled nearer, for Ben's heaving chest calmed down somewhat, his drooping eyes half-closed, his face became full of rest, and with a long-drawn effort he whispered, "The light's a-goin'," but he could not finish what he would have said.

Smallbone looked up at the rush-light on the table, and as he looked, with a leap and a last flare-up, the tongue of fire dropped dead into the socket. In the shadow, Smallbone saw that the shapeless figure of the widow Boswell had settled lower. Ben's hand lay resting on Help's head as if blessing

him. He was still breathing, but slower and calmer. Smallbone's face looked troubled, and as the old man knelt he besought Ben, as we only do when we beseech the passing soul, to tell him what he wanted. The old man entreated again and again, "Where d'ye say as ye've seen her, Ben—tell me;" and his words became broken as a little child's. Ben did not answer, and when Smallbone saw (he never knew how long after) that Ben had already set out in the starlight for the great Gathering of the shepherds, the old man rose up as one who has over-slept himself and fears to be left behind. But when he looked at the widow Boswell, she was asleep too, dreaming she was a widow no longer, and from that dream he would not wake her. Then did Smallbone, remembering Ben's words, say to himself the text which he had heard in the last Sunday of the Old Year: "We know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."

And ye, superstitious ones, blinded by the Obeism of "chance and coincidence"—riddle out your own cunning interpretation of the dying words of shepherd Ben, and those of the dying Socrates, when he said,

Καὶ γάρ εἰμι ἤδη ἐνταῦθα, ἐν ᾧ μάλιστα  
ἄνθρωποι χρησμοδοῦσιν, ὅταν μέλλωσιν  
ἀποθανεῖσθαι.

*(And I am now come thither, where chiefly  
men become prophetic—being about to die.)*

## VIII.

## MY FRIEND WITH THE FRILL.

WE have met. We may never meet again. I shall know him, though, wherever it may be. Whether, as this afternoon, in society, among the politely ill-mannered crowd, that flocked upon the lawn, or filled the drawing-room, or flirted in the library at the Lady Selina's "At Home," when that personage lent her influence to the mauling and marring of our goodly English word. Whether it be only a hurried glance up some side-street, as I am whirled through noisy thoroughfares; whether it be on the sands of some sea-side watering-place; or whether it be upon the stage of some pantomime—I shall know him. He may have changed his coat for a longer one; he

may have added a cubit to his frill; he may have discarded it altogether; he may have taken unto himself spectacles—but I shall know him, him, my new old Bohemian friend.

He was the last arrival. It was after the Bohea and black scandal had revived the goddesses of many seasons, so often at "At Homes," so seldom at home. It was after the flirting had begun to flag, when Gourmet *ainé* had grown warm with wine and wrath at his rejected advances, and Gourmet *cadet*, the little *attaché*, had grown cold with ices and the frigid smiles of her, who, fencing with the spoon, said sweetly, "I like to win, monsieur, I like not to be won." It was after the weary twaddle-talkers had gathered in the drawing-room, and were lethargically listening to a recital of "Lady Clare"—all her wooing and woeing and winning—declaimed by the ethereal Madame Accentura, standing upon the Cawnpore-rug, her heel firmly fixed against the fender, her eyes upon the central ornament of the



gaselier, and her arms describing eccentric and concentric curves through the intermediate distance. It was while the central ornament was being told, with the most confidential and winning smile, that it should "still be Lady Clare ;" it was while the little palms of the ladies were patting with just sufficient demonstration to attract the ear of our hostess, yet gently enough not to endanger the outraging of feelings, or the opening of the seams of gloves, or the disturbing the repose of Society. It was while the fluttering fans were working the spell, and calling up the little genii, who all whispered "Charming !" that I first saw him. I was peeping through the open window at the heavy-hanging, long red-tongued fuschias and thinking of the line,

"Your riddle is hard to read."

As I say, he was the last to arrive. But what matter? Is not a certain high and mighty Prince said to have special regard for, and indeed, a legal claim upon "the

hindmost?" And does not Society hence ever view the fashionable victim with consideration and favour?

The entry, however, of this 'late arrival' was unorthodox in the extreme. Tell it not in Gath, but he turned in at the servants' entrance. I saw him come round by the laurels, and stroll over a flower-border, and across the lawn, in close company with "Two such extraordinary creatures, my dear," said Diana d'Oglander; "Who *can* they be?"

It was not this remark of the careful and far-seeing *chaperon*; it was not the appearance of the two extraordinary creatures; it was the bearing and carriage, the unconscious simplicity of the last arrival, as he crossed the *parterre*, which awakened my interest. Surely, a guest, who came in at the servants' entrance, who was evidently a Bohemian, and who kept company with two others of the same erratic race, who evidently cared not for the bondage of conventionalities, yet who, in deference to civilisation generally, had consented to indulge us with his presence,

would prove upon acquaintance to be as refreshing as a siesta this sultry afternoon. *He* would probably dispense with the formality of an introduction.

I managed to work my way, silently and deviously, out of the room, just as an *ex-basso-profundo*-looking individual was heaving out his hair, and hauling in his wrinkles, thereby to trim his visage into a suitable expression for the commencement of an effort at Hamlet-murder.

I found the last arrival out in the garden, apparently very happy, and looking as if he intended to remain indefinitely in that place and that frame of mind. He was in no hurry to do his devoir, even to our hostess. He sauntered up and down, and stayed some moments to examine a plate of strawberries, which lay on the grass—deliberately standing upon a lady's train the while, without attempting to apologise. But he may not have observed his impoliteness, for he was at least three yards off the owner of the silken snare.

His face was familiar to me. Where had I seen him? I had never spoken to him before, and he shewed no especial sign of recognition, as I went up to him, and said, "Toby, old fellow, how are you?" But the greeting was a friendly one, nevertheless, and demonstrative to — no, I cannot say, to vulgarity, for only the human animal can become vulgar, and Toby, my old new friend, was a dog.

Toby did not recognise me, though we had often met before. Why should he? Whenever we had met, 'twas in a crowd, and Toby was always busy—why should *he* recognise *me*?—Toby, who saw, in the way of his profession, so many a score of faces every day? He made up for it now, though, and I had the honour of a greeting so enthusiastic, that it would have been a pardonable ambition on the part of any of the guests, to receive such an ovation. Toby first of all sat down, and presented his shapely, though ungloved paw. He then rose, calling into vigorous action that endear-

ing member, his tail. He then spoke to me—not in the stagey tone, in which he was wont to reply affirmatively, when asked by his imperious master in the play, “If he were not his lost, stolen, or strayed dog?” but in a genuine, hearty utterance, which came from the bottom of his heart. We were firm friends from that moment. I asked where his companions were? He looked round at a scaffold of painted wood, which was lying on its side at the edge of the lawn, and then knowingly at me, and I understood him that they were “beering.” I proposed a little walk together, away from the *parterre*, now nearly covered with the full bloom of its human flower-beds; he fairly jumped about with delight, as we went through the shrubbery, and discovered remoter and quieter parts of the garden, where we dislodged the unfortunate Gourmet *cadet*, who was investigating the raspberries in solitude, having some time since taken leave of our hostess, on the plea that his dinner-hour was drawing nigh. Here Toby and I congratu-

lated ourselves upon our new-found friendship, and upon the fact that his gyratory expressions of the same could not shock the "quality," whom we had left on the lawn. Toby was very expressive and communicative, as we mutually found many points in each other for admiration. For was he not a handsome fellow, despite his Bohemian bearing? and if his feet were a trifle dusty, was not his coat a better fit than the best Bond-street tailor's? While manners, which maketh man, made Toby a gentleman.

But our walk was abruptly terminated. We heard voices in the shrubbery. Ah! others would disturb our *tête-à-tête*. There was a whistle, and Toby began to elongate his nose, and to put an anxious expression into his loving face. He looked wistfully, and then turned towards the place the voices came from. Politeness compelled me to say, "Toby, I suppose we must be returning." He appeared relieved, but walked as if he would hide from me the fact that he was making haste. I was forced to humour him,

and quicken my pace also. This was a "collar-day," and Toby was as yet without his, and before he appears in this august society, he must go and get dressed. His valet-master—a combined office held by so many of the domestics of the Lady Selina Bluebogle's other guests, was waiting to attend upon Toby. Toby's toilet, as befitted his Bohemian character, was performed upon the grass-plat. He stood as meekly as many of his betters, while the *valet-de-parterre* placed round his comely neck a white frill, which was produced from a property-box near at hand, and near to the four-poster tent bedstead—no, Theatre Royal—for Toby was a professional.

Jaggers, the half-tailed barrister, and youthful, truthful cynic, called Toby a strolling-player, but Jaggers is a pessimist. Toby was about to perform in that ancient play which has never needed a "revival,"—the History of Punch and his peccadilloes. Simple plot, and little wit; old as the "tragical-comical" plays of which Polonius spoke, yet holding

its own even in our critically-enlightened age. Toby was about to act, and take the leading, living character. Poor Toby! and this hot sweltering afternoon too. Toby did not seem to mind, however, and giving his ruffle a preliminary rotatorial shake, he came to me for my approval of his get-up. *He* appeared well-satisfied with it. It was his best. It was clean; it was stiff; it was faultless, and altogether more resplendent than the everyday one in which he generally appeared before the public. It was historical, too, for in this identical collar, three seasons ago, Toby had been presented at Court, and had there rustled and mantled it before certain August and Royal Personages, when Punch, erect and triumphant, had delivered in crowing key his simple prologue (spoken for the occasion), "God Save our Queen!"

Toby's attendants had, on arriving, gone like the other guests to partake of a little mild refreshment. Toby, Bohemian as he was, was abstemious. He made no unseemly rush for the canteen department. He cared



not for the refreshment tent, but having taken up his position, sat looking at me, quietly enjoying the fragrance of the "Mrs. Bakers," and the "Lady Pollocks," and the other sorely mis-named but sweetly-smelling roses. As a rose-petal left its fellows, and fluttered away, launching forth upon a wind-blown voyage of discovery, Toby looked after it with a pathetic and philosophical expression, as if he saw a likeness in the journey of this rose-leaf to the long and chequered journey of his own life.

It was interesting to watch him as he sat, very silent, deep in some day-dream, perhaps, of "cause and effect" benevolently considered, or, more probably, of the past career of the Dramatic Brotherhood, some of whom he had known awhile, until, like petals, grown old and wizen, they had retired to be launched forth, or be cast out upon a windy sphere of existence. Poor old philosopher, he was becoming thoughtful and sad! I was about to turn the current of his reflections, but an intruder did it for me—a

big, bold, swaggering creature, monstrous among his species, self-assertive as Lucifer. I had watched him for some time. He had already chosen a victim—that new young *débutante* of fashion and beauty, with the peacock-fan and gold eye-glass, the belle of the month, the new Amazon-recruit, training to fight those great warriors, the years, who now stand off-guard round their piled arms in the camp of Time. He had marked her, this insolent *flâneur*, and breaking through a circle of admirers, mostly of the masculine gender, had the impudence to settle upon her wrist. The fair Amarinda, who was trying to look down so artlessly, so innocently, with a spirit of inquiring wonder, on every insignificant little blade beneath her, had repelled him with becoming and dignified gravity of manner; and now this wanton intruder upon flirtation had betaken himself off, but only to bother Toby. Toby gave me an interrogatory look, and then another at the blue-bottle, while he calculated the powers of

his *maxillae*, and then without any assumed gravity or dignity, in his own simple way he uttered a sharp but very audible remark, which put the obnoxious fly out of the pale of society for ever. Expressionless moderation is the aim of the *beau-monde* nowadays, but Toby is a Bohemian, so his demonstrative feeling may be pardoned, especially since it has allowed the guests to enjoy their moderation unmolested.

Toby would have liked very well to have enjoyed another quarter of an hour, sitting by my side in quiet contemplation; but his valet had disappeared behind the green curtain, while the other even more regardlessly got-up and respectable attendant was standing, *bâton* in hand, ready to lead off the orchestra. Being out of doors he kept his hat on his head, after lifting it ceremoniously to the company. By the narrow band upon that hat, our leader of the pipes and big drum was in mourning; by its now faded whiteness and its multitudinous indentations, it had once been Another's. It had mourned

before, under other proprietorship, and beneath other skies, yet it still strove to be respectable, battered as it was—in this particular laudably rivalling the habits and customs of some of the elder guests.

Toby took the well-known overture as a matter-of-course—beginning down in the bass, low and mumbling, with the big drum, and then warming up into a *bravura* effect, with an ascending and descending scale on the pipes. He shut his eyes, as we had all done just now, while the more touching passages in the life of the Lady Clare were being emphasised. But he listened more attentively when the overture was finished, and the play began. He listened expectantly when Mr. Punch appeared, bowing and calling in cracked yet lusty voice for his better (but beaten) half. Toby even turned when that ill-used character appeared, and the upbraiding and recrimination, waxing warm and high, necessitated a settlement of the altercation by an earnest appeal to the rules of the club, which ended

the dispute for the time—leaving Punch triumphant and alone on the stage, joyfully nursing the “nine points of the law,” in the shape of his maul-stick and first-born. Toby grew pathetic as Punch warbled a quavering lullaby to the duodecimo edition of himself in long clothes; he trembled as Punch nursed the speechless infant, rocked it, nay *shook* it to sleep. Toby was deeply interested in the plot by this time, and upon Mr. Punch’s luckless offspring turning the inevitable somersault out of window, he rushed off and hid his feelings behind the green curtain. The catastrophe to the Punchicle was the cue for Toby to “go on.” There was no bell, no prompter’s call-whistle—“Pipes” did not even give the warning upon the big drum. Toby knew that when Punchicle rolled from the window, *his* turn was come to hold himself in readiness. Punch looked down from his post of vantage with one eye, great and motionless, to view, as he put it, “the poor corpse,” and get “a bird’s eye measurement for a coffin”

"Pipes" slowly and solemnly stayed his reedy accompaniment, while he stooped to pick up the remains of babyhood. This done, the deceased was borne off to the rear, and returned no more from behind the recesses of the green curtain.

After this catastrophe, the Blue Beadle appeared, calling, "Hi! hi! hi!" in husky voice, but became suddenly quiet again after Mr. Punch had directed his attention to that official's visual organ. Having sent the unfortunate Beadle to his Satanic majesty, howling in high falsetto, Mr. Punch joyfully called for his friend Toby. There was a lull, and Toby was hoisted slowly through some unseen trap. He did not look nervous as he made his *début* before so august an assemblage. He hung his head somewhat low at first certainly, but this was only that he might bow to a little row of children, who, sitting in front of the stage, had caught his eye. In their faces he may have discerned that *something* which was common to all his commoner audiences. Toby liked

children. He took up his position at the corner of the stage, his red and white ruffle erect and resplendent. Once, before his part commenced, he half-turned to where I was sitting, evidently glad to know that I was a witness of and a partaker in the applause which his audiences generally bestowed on him, and which was not wanting upon this occasion ; hands pattered where usually they clapped, and the noisy burr of excitement was apparent only in the front row, but for all that, his reception was not a cold one.

Meanwhile Mr. Punch was advancing, in sidelong and rather jerky fashion. Toby and he shook hands. Mr. Punch appeared elated at his recent feat, and congratulated Toby upon his general appearance, turning and informing the audience that he would not take four bright sovereigns for him. This appeared in nowise to raise Toby in his own esteem. He only in excess of good-nature, continued to shake hands, and was still doing so, when a gentleman popped up,

and remarked that he had lost his dog three weeks ago.

To this Mr. Punch replied fiercely, that he had found *his* dog at about the same date. This produced an altercation, and an arbitration was proposed, before appealing to the rule of the club—Toby to be arbitrator. An unbiassed and peaceful conclusion might have been arrived at, as to which of the claimants Toby rightfully belonged to, had not a scuffle ensued, in which the irate and protesting gentleman received an unlucky thrust which put him at once *hors de combat*, and, indeed, off the stage altogether. In the *mêlée*, Mr. Punch got bitten, and unfortunately upon the nose—but not until the litigious rivals had nearly pulled Toby in two, in their strenuous endeavours to enforce the argument of the “nine points of law.”

It was evident from the first that Mr. Punch had a habit of putting his nose into everything, and the natural consequence was, that while all three were talking at once, Mr. Punch's nose should drop into Toby's open



mouth. Toby was angry—though, like all good arbitrators, he shewed his emotion not one jot. Yet, when he saw in Mr. Punch's nose a prey on which to wreak his canine wrath, he vigorously seized the opportunity. Punch had put his nose, and Toby his foot into it. It was, however, a relief to all, that poor Toby, for this proper exhibition of spirit, received only a stage-castigation. He sat up, and tried to look oppressed, while plaudits greeted the tremulous movements of Mr. Punch's nasal elongation.

After this, Mr. Punch fell sick, as per plot, and a surgeon being sent for, Toby's part in the performance was over. The subsequent proceedings, though enlivened by a ghost and a green dragon, were wanting in interest, after Toby, the chief character, had left the boards. True, Mr. Punch was playing his part better than ever, and was in excellent voice. He tried at times to assume the society tone, while his soliloquies were of the most grandiloquent description. The minor characters, too, all strove their utmost

in this at once lengthened and expurgated performance. But the chief actor was gone. I looked to the stage-door to see him re-join me—the curtain moved mysteriously, and Toby's dear old head was thrust from under the green baize. Having given himself a shake-down, to settle his ruffle, he drew himself along the grass, to have a stretch after his exertions, and then ran up to my side again. Many expressions of kindness were bestowed on him—indeed, from one corner of the lawn came a slight suspicion of clapping hands, from the younger and more demonstrative portion of his audience. Even the older and graver part honoured the actor with the mild attention of their gold-rimmed glasses.

Toby did not court the acclamations or the interest of the many. He had found one friend who understood him; and when I said "Toby, let us go and get some refreshment," he quietly and promptly acquiesced. Toby's appetite was as healthy as his face, but it was not an easy matter to satisfy it from the

tent—a very *Thesaurus* of brilliantly coloured poisons from Piccadilly, a museum of monstrosities in *pâtisserie*, ancient and modern—a series of triumphs in waffles and *pâtés* which war against the stomach, the infernal conceptions of that white demon, the *chef-de-cuisine*, but a place almost as devoid as inquisitorial dungeon of food, pure and simple. However, we entered, resolved to make, if possible, a judicious selection.

As a white-stockinged Ganymede charged out with a claret-cup and a plate of trifle, nearly running down my hungry friend, I saw Toby look up with an expression of surprise—evidently taking the gorgeous cup-bearer for a rival and gigantic Punch. But he quickly observed that the Ganymede's nose had not grown commensurately with his other features. Hereupon Toby's visage became ludicrous in the extreme; he shut one eye at the gaudy impostor, and then gaily sitting down with his discovery, obtrusively hung out his tongue—an action luckily unnoticed by the retreating Gany-

mede, whose fortunes led him among the gods, nor allowed that minister of familiar spirits to recognise so low a thing as a Bohemian jest.

Toby did not appreciate ices, cream or water, white or coloured, plain or banded. Nor was he to be lured by flavour of vanille, or strawberry, or the goodly pine-apple. He viewed an ice-wafer with suspicion—refusing it politely, however, by turning sideways, with his head aristocratically up in the air, seeing in it, probably, some resemblance to Mr. Punch's club, which, as a stage-joke, he was so often facetiously asked to eat, preparatory to the usual prod in the stomachic region.

Caramels, *nougatines*, *croquettes*, tempted him not, nor did he thirst for Ganymede's *Château la Rose*, iced as it was, and its praises gurgling in every throat. It was an ungentlemanly trick of old Tropdevie, to offer Toby his glass, but Toby quietly turned his back on the affront, and the Count had to drink his own insult.

I proposed to Toby that we should leave the tent, and turn to explore a quiet part of the house, where were to be seen a row of maids who surveyed the scene from an open window. We were in the unorthodox corner, but what matter? Did not Toby appear to observe the well-concealed signs of stable and scullery with a sniff of relief? A request for food brought forth, may be, more clumsy-looking, but certainly more satisfying and wholesome viands. Toby, after sitting up to say "grace," made a substantial meal, not calculated to destroy his constitution. What a capital table-companion he would make! Will it ever be my lot to dine with him? Dear Toby! and I dine to-morrow with that old Heavyflank, to whom I am bound, however, by what are called "Social ties," which mean Port and a discussion of the artificial—artificially considered. Oh, for a steak in my quiet chambers, with you, Toby, for a guest!

Toby was no *gourmet*; he did not feed all-absorbed in his platter, grunting, swilling,

and gobbling like so many of the *bon-vivants* whom we all know. Toby ate like a gentleman who knows how to make a meal an opportunity of talk and thought. Toby looked up from his plate after every mouthful, and once, out of mere goodfellowship, offered his paw to me.

When he had finished, I said in jest, "Toby, shall we join the ladies?" but Toby preferred another *tête-à-tête* first; so I led the way back through a side-walk, where we could have a little more of each other's society unrestrained. It was then that I found out what a benevolent character he was, and what a humourist—a mimic—a canine Garrick among his theatrical brethren. Could he dance? Oh, yes, he could dance—without that accomplishment no comedian's education is complete. And looking nervously round, lest such unorthodox conduct might be observed by the quality, he dexterously performed a "*pas-de-deux*," finishing up with a graceful though cautiously delivered *pirouette*. This per-

formance suggested that the *maitre de ballet* under whom he had studied might possibly have introduced another art to Toby's adaptive spirit. Feeling, therefore, with all due circumspection (lest any intruder might witness the revelation), I searched the innermost recesses of that garment, which, if rightly cut, and faultlessly fitting, gains so much credit for the wearer. From it, I produced a pipe, and scarce had I presented it to Toby, when the question was answered by his taking it, with the air of a veteran, into the corner of his mouth. What more I wonder could Toby do?

But alas! White-hat, throttled in his black cravat, loomed through the bushes, and our talk was at an end. Toby's engagement was over, and Toby's attendance was requested by his "Company," who were leaving. White-hat produced a card from an old wash-leather purse, with the remark, "Hout o' town till Christmas: that's my address, sir, where I resides, an' shall be 'appy to attend upon yer at children's

parties, as performed at Winsur Carstle." As I read the card, I look up—but I am alone in the side walk.

The season is nearly over. A thin, tired House sits for the last time to-night. And when the lantern on the Parliamentary beacon shall have withdrawn its flashing signal, to adjourn into darkness for six months; and when the last member, wending homewards, shall hear the trembling Big Ben beat out the hour in troubled air, Toby will be far on his way to "star" it in the provinces.



## IX.

## THE NEAR-SIDE PASSENGER.

WHAT an infinite amount of pleasure is lost to those who take no interest in what they are pleased to call the "Public." One of the greatest pleasures of travelling is the facility which it gives of watching, and talking with those, who, though not governed by the same habits and manners as ourselves, yet all help to complete that vast living group, connected by one tie, and included within one frame in one picture of Humanity.

As boys, perhaps, it was not entirely the love of excitement which made us appreciate the way in which a sailor, whenever he hired a cab, invariably deposited that quaint porpoise-looking thing which he designated "traps" *within* the vehicle—he himself

choosing the better place (to *his* mind), and appearing suddenly seated beside the driver, "above decks," on the box. That cab was more interesting to us than the next, on which a portmanteau and a nose-bag were the sole companions of a Jehu who drove by, disclosing for a moment the melancholy silhouette of his fare on the back-seat inside. We wished *we* could be that sailor, and ride on the box next the "cabby." There is always something of interest to be learned from every one, and it is sad to think how much pleasure and sympathy they lose who do not care to feel this.

To-day, worried with some of those many cares, which to the individual himself appear so oppressive, and to the indifferent outsider so slight, we returned homewards upon an omnibus—for that broad and endless road with scarce a turn for miles, gave little relief to tired heart and limb. Mounting that rostrum from which presiding "Whip" is wont to display many another faculty besides that of driving, we rumbled along the noisy

highway toward—but no matter where—perhaps it was to one of those monotonously “healthy” suburbs, where all the houses are “residences,” and are described as “desirable,” and “semi-detached.” Or, perhaps, it was to a part less modern and fresh-looking, but more fragrant with association and memory of Poet and Painter, who no longer pays, or tries to pay the water-rate, being long since gone from earthly studio, but teaching yet, and making us love him still as we walk past the red-brick house, or beneath the leaning and crumbling ivy-covered wall, or stop awhile and peep under the box-tree and through the little green gate, at the old-fashioned heavily-beaded windows of the low rambling cottage. In front, the same holly-bush and old tea-rose still gently rustle, and seem to turn towards the porch inquiringly as the door opens and shuts again on a new-known, unknown figure.

Perhaps we were going to that dreary district through which the unbusiness-like and supremely lovable Essayist and India

Office clerk used to wander with his sister, wistfully looking like children in the shops, at the tempting trinkets—tempting, but forbidden to those whose pockets perform no other office than that of warming the hands. Perhaps we were going—well—*where* we really went to is of no importance, except to our duns; and indeed were a more precise statement to be made, its veracity might well be called into question—for had we been asked upon that same omnibus-box, we should have replied, looking down the endless dreary vista, “Nowhere.” But to-night, were the query put again to us, we, in a happier frame of mind, and concealed within an ascending cloud of smoke, would lazily mutter, “Home”—Home—yes, sweet word to an Englishman, even if it is only a place where he can draw a bolt across the door. And so, being safe at home, we are thinking over the things which have befallen us to-day; but more especially do we think of our “Near-Side Passenger.”

Hardly had we settled down to a brief

rest and introspective brood over our troubles in general, when it suddenly occurred to us that we were encroaching upon the nine or ten square inches allotted on the box-seat to a fellow-passenger of whose existence we were made aware by a remark from the cheery-faced and benignant driver who towered above us, "Make 'im git orf, under my feet, sir."

The idea of rolling up a poor inoffensive man, just as if he were a rug, and stowing him away under the driver's feet, even if there had been no remonstrance on his part, was to us repulsive in the extreme. Much distressed, scarcely wakened from our reverie, and not comprehending the polite offer, we turned and discovered in our fellow-passenger, no man drunk or defiant, but a rough, dusty, ungroomed dog upon the seat, which was huggling up to us, and trying to attract our attention by licking our sleeve. A dog belonging to that large breed everywhere met with, but never described in any of the books on Dogs and their habits. It

shall have a name though—let it be called “Cosmopolitan!” His form was none, or if any, sorry—more like to some discarded *amphora*, such as may have lain, worn out and useless, in a stony brook on the Campagna two thousand years ago—than to any classified animal now extant; without any of those marks or spots, admiration of dog-fanciers, who rejoice in pointing them out as heraldic coats-of-arms belonging to the great canine family. We were indeed on the point of writing the words, “Tyke,” “Mongrel,” in the blank space against his character. But though in all probability he was never anything great at watching bolt-holes—much to the dissatisfaction of would-be-friendly rat-catching trainers, yet as there is a suspicion of contempt in the two former titles, and as this dog had won our respect, we will refrain from using them. Mongrel he might be, but he could not be called commonplace! Here was no well-set head, with ears that stood up and looked at themselves, no sting-tail, or

polished coat in which might be seen reflected a picture of surrounding objects wherewith to delight the hearts of connoisseurs. Yet one glance at those eyes, so staunch and pathetic—but which, alas! looked as if the only hunt their owner had ever known, was one in which hunger and stones played the chief part—I say, one glance at those eyes would for ever prevent a genuine lover of animals for their own sakes, from calling him commonplace.

“Your dog?” we asked of the ruddy-faced driver, who was patting the animal with a very large hand, partially covered by a very large yellow glove, from which the button had long since flown.

“No, sir,” was the short and unsatisfactory reply. A few moments’ reflection—while we were getting ready another unobjectionable form of satiating our curiosity, was broken into by, “Taint no *one’s* dawg in partickler. ’Longs to all of us.”

Who were “all of us,” we wondered? Surely not that greengrocer’s boy, for one—

whom at that instant we saw judiciously and economically picking out a rotten potato from a heap on his master's stall, to shy at a timid half-starved cur, which had taken refuge beneath a wash-hand-stand at a furniture-dealer's next door, to evade the boisterous inquisitiveness of a large brindled bull-terrier—whose eyes, like the wicked man's of the Psalmist, stood out with fatness, and who had, as far as appearances went, "more than heart could wish." We hoped not. Well, there had been *one* kind soul who cared to give refuge and a ride to this other cur. Emboldened, we inquired, "Does he not then belong to any one? Are you taking care of him?"

"Yes, I often 'as 'im to ride up along o' me, most days, 'specially now the running's so 'eavy, an' 'e's got so weazy. 'E's the most wonderful, faithful old dawg as ever was, an' so we all 'as a 'and at keeping 'im. That's to say, all us 'busmen on this line, an' it's rum how d'reckly he took up with us, 'e'd never go with no other, an' 'e always spots



our 'busses, an' our men, an' never would go along with no one else ; an' when they other 'bus blokes whistles to 'im—there, he wags 'is old tail, an' seems as he slinks orf, to say, 'Taint good enough, guv'nor.' No, 'e's always kep' to us, 'tween 'ere an' the Carshalton. He'll go up one bus, an' down another, or p'raps 'e'll go two journeys with the same one, if 'e likes to ; an' then they'll put 'im down, say, at the Carshalton, an' there 'e'll wait till they come back ; or p'raps another of us chaps takes 'im down ; then he'll do an 'orf,' an' wait at t'other end, an' loaf about, till we comes back, or some one else takes 'im up along. *He* dont much care, as long as it's one of 'is line, though 'e 'as 'is favourites. Aint yer, Racer ? I'm yer oldest pal, aint I, old boy ? An' that's the way he does, all day long."

"And all night ? and in bad weather ? Does he keep on until the busses cease running ?"

"Ah ! that's just weere it is, sir—he *do* feel this wet weather an' the cold nights

terrible, poor fellow. He bears it wuss lately, too, an' all last winter, he was that lean an' mean-looking, the vet who lodges in the parlours below me an' my missus, said as 'ow he wornt wuth a damn, an' wanted him put out of the way. But I warn't goin' to let 'im play the artful on me like that. An' Racer's picked up wonderful, lately, spite o' the damp. An' the gents I takes down in the mornin' says they wouldn't know 'im agen. He stopped runnin' a whole three weeks, jest about when that snow came, an' all the trams was stopped, an' we went down three 'osses—an' even then bad work it was. Well, 'e stayed at 'ome long o' the kids—an' the kids, wornt they sorry when he got up, an' would come out along of us agen! What's his age? Poor old fellow, he looks as if 'e was a-gettin' old now. 'Ow old is 'e? Well, 'e fust took to runnin' alongside of us, nine year ago, an' then he worn't a pup. But, lor, sir, it aint the age so much, but the bad treatment 'e'd 'ad afore 'e come to us. He used to run at

rust, 'fore 'e got so old an' feeble. He'd keep up all the way an' back, an' *would* do it, till we noticed it. We never knowed where 'e come from; he turned up permiscuous-like, an' then one busman an' another 'ud chuck 'im a scrap or two, while he was a-heatin' 'is dinner. An' so 'e'd keep to one or t'other of us, an' if we lost sight of 'im a bit, we knew he'd turn up somewhere along the road—p'raps at the 'Mischief,' or might be, where we change osses, or somewhere or t'other."

"His name is— what did you say?"

"Racer, sir. That's what we giv' him, 'cos of his keepin' up so well, an' it's surprisin', even now 'e dont run, what lots of gents there is as knows 'is name. 'E's only got to stick 'is old nose out of the apron, an' there's sure to be some gent or other, going by on a bus, to sing out to 'im. Oh, 'e's 'nown as well as I knows my best 'orses from they country grass-growers they've giv' us since the trams took to runnin'. There's a pair now, we'll take up directly, for these. Lord love ye, sir—a

bay an' a young brown mare—why, as I ses, they're only fit for statues, it's a sin to put 'em in a bus. Lazy? Why, they'd lean their 'eds over that there pole, an' go to sleep, if you'd let 'em. Ah, poor old Racer, 'e wont last much longer, I'm thinkin'. 'E'll die on the road—though most of us 'ud 'ave 'im at home at night, if 'e'd let 'em; but no, 'e wont. He never slept out o' the stables, excep' last winter, when he come along o' me. He generally goes off with one of the last busses to the stables; an' there he'll curl up, an' go to sleep till the first eight o'clock bus starts in the mornin'.

“The tax? Well, no one didn't take no notice till they made it five shillin's, an' smelt after it so precious sharp. So I ses to the chaps up at the Carshalton, ‘Why, yer aint a-going to lose a faithful animal like that, as 'as stuck to yer, for a paltry five shillin's? Why, I'd 'ave sent my missis out with my Sunday coat, 'fore I'd do that.’ So we gets up a supscription, an' I takes my 'at round; an' this one gives a trifle, an' that

one gives a trifle, an' my kids supscribes fo' pence; an' so we makes up the sum, an' they draws up a right proper license for us, just like for a gentleman's dawg, an' it states 'ow that we've paid the sum of five shillin's, bein' the duty for a year, for 'Racer,' owner, omnibus men at the Carshalton. So there aint no pleeseman can nobble 'im now. Who keeps the licence? Why, I does, cos I've been along 'ere longest; or rather, my missus does, an' it's put away in her workbox along with her 'lines.'"

We have been thinking about Racer, till we find we have over-ridden our distance. But that is little matter to us, and feeling that there are yet more questions to be asked of so good an historian, we decide to over-ride yet farther. We remark that such a dog has a public interest; and we add to ourselves, "and does public good." For he is the living emblem of kindly, divine tenderness within the hearts of rugged, world-beaten, and often brutally coarse men.

"Quite true, sir. 'Public dawg,' an'

ought to 'ave a benefit, like they do for many a wuss object at the theaytre," observes a mechanic, who has just got up on the off-side, and who evidently knows Racer's story already. We suggest that a collar with a broad plate and a short and suitable inscription upon it, would be a good way of calling the attention of many who otherwise would perhaps not think to notice such a characteristic and worthy dog. We further add that we think we know some friends who, on being told the tale, would be only too glad to provide the needful, should funds not be readily forthcoming, or who would join with the busmen, if they preferred it.

"No, sir; no collar wouldn't do. They other chaps 'ud get prigging it; 'e wouldn't keep it on his neck a week—not for want, sir, of proper pride, for dawgs know; but 'e's got so confidin', bein' with us. When he fust came, after 'e'd been fed up a bit, an' got cheeky, 'e'd a kep' it right enough, an' knowed they meant mischief. But now

he's weak, an' careless, an' confidin' like, for everyone's a kind word for 'im, an' 'e'd let 'em 'ave it. A smart collar 'ud be too much for they others. No; 'e's known without no collar. An' when 'e's dead, there's some on us wont forget 'im."

We confess to feeling a pang at finding that our plan for commemorating this instance of canine and human fidelity was impracticable. We feel also some righteous indignation against, and yet pity for, those who could commit the sacrilege of letting their meanness take such a form, and we think of the many "Defence" and "Offence" funds which pour in from a circle of admiring friends, whenever some one has committed a sufficiently illegal or impudently immoral action. We would wish to do something for this legitimate object of our interest, and we know not how to do it.

We have reached—not our journey's end—but the end of the route, and as his archpatron hands us down the faithful Racer, and as we look into his tender eyes, over

which the film of old age is slowly creeping, like sunset mist at sea, we wonder whether it is hiding them from us for ever; or whether, at a new dawn, it shall but render the fitness of things more complete. When old things have passed away, and when all things shall have become new, shall we see them once more as they were here on earth, remembering the likeness their eyes have to the eyes of immortal men? But what am I writing about? A dog; a dog that until the late Liberal, coffer-keeping Government came into power, did not even pay taxes!

Absurd! you laugh at me, and perhaps you add, "Little things please little minds;" but do you not see that this dog has a human interest? That his life is a great and beautiful part of the life of your brother-man? Perhaps, in some dark night, when you are vainly trying to round head-land doubts and disbeliefs, ignorant of your bearings, and tossing on a sea of trouble—perhaps there may suddenly flash upon the despairing look-out of your soul, from time



to time, like a revolving light, a memory such as this, which may, guiding past shoal and sunken reef, carry you to port, where you may land that precious freight you bear for the use of your fellow men. If so, it will be well; you, too, will be the happier for knowing and loving my "Near-Side Passenger."

X.

A CHRISTMAS EVE IN TUMBRIL  
TOWN.

WITH the wind in the "right quarter," with a clear sky—well, perhaps *one* cloud, as large as a man's hand, but the rest nowhere—with a waste-pipe which should keep the mud in the roadway below a certain high mud-mark, and that mark, the tops of one's boots—with just *one* pail of whitewash for the front of that dirtiest of all the double line of dirty houses—could High-Street Tumbriel Town be called passable, even in a pedestrian sense? But on this dark day in late December, on this Christmas Eve, with the wind in its "usual quarter," blowing in from miles of marsh and miserable land, gathering in cloudy folds a green and murky fog,

bringing up its heavy squadrons in close order, and riding slowly and solemnly into town upon a sooty shower, High-Street Tumbril Town might be the highway to Hades.

Always poor from their birth upwards, but at no time respectable, the houses of to-day have an appearance as if each one is concealing something, a "receiver—" of "missing friends," holding and hiding "divers articles," divers miseries, and divers sins. Sulky they look, but not sorrowful—worn and weather-stained, but not venerable—wretched and helpless altogether.

Erected at the commencement of the present Century, one yet cannot think of them as having seen seventy summers. No—standing and looking up at them in this oleaginous atmosphere, it is rather by seventy Novembers that we reckon their age. In many places the stucco has cracked, in others it has peeled off their wizen and sallow faces, thereby imparting the appearance of some gigantic eruption, which, having subsided,

has still left cruel traces and blotches on its unhealthy victims. A nearer inspection shows that some of these blotches have taken to themselves strange and fantastic shapes—silhouettes, horribly human, and by their expression repulsively suggesting the thought that in some instances, and by some occult chance, they may actually present a likeness of some former inhabitant.

Does *that* one portray a passage in some now forgotten life-history? That round scar, between those two windows whose blinds are drawn down? It is a ghastly accident, if such it be—this decay, whose finger formed with such precision that upturned bullet head, that sunken nose, and that wide-open mouth. Is this mark the delineation and expression of one tragic moment in some man's mystery? The blow must have been a crushing one that could cut those features into such a look of helpless agony! Is Vengeance the grim engraver of this monochrome?

The shops are crowded with all sorts and

conditions of wares—except good ones, and they offer to the purchaser no article in any but the worst condition. The “small profit” and “second-hand” systems are the two best known in Tumbril Town.

The private houses suggest lodgers in every room, from the basement to the second-floor, front and back—and at this stage of existence, sub-lodgers, who occupy the corners, and pay rent to their lodger-landlords.

Every lintel and window-frame has “settled,” in builder’s phrase, and nothing looks on “the square”—from that open window to the man who is leaning out of it, or the stack of chimneys which stoop their contorted cowls, and strive to eye him from the roof above. Just now they are listening, and very still; but of nights, when their long throats are nearly choked with the suffocating fumes which carry up to them the sounds of many a secret deed and wrong—of nights, when the wind is on the move, getting ready to steal away beyond the roofs,

out on to the dark broad river, and down to the sea, the great Purifier, where winds may lie in quarantine—then do these chimneys turn round their wakeful heads and utter their hoarse complaint. Then do they “proclaim from the house-tops” the deeds of darkness below; then do they make their appeal to the great Marshal of the Winds; and sometimes for an instant—their voices descending—their howl is heard by terrified mortals, who start and tremble in the very midnight of their evil-doing.

The ground-floor of nearly every alternate house is a public drinking-bar, while the upper storeys are “let out” by the enterprising proprietors, with a view to lodging as many as possible of their customers who may be drunk on the premises.

Every bar has its sign-board; the signs do not swing, but are in every instance attached to the frontage of the house. As Tumbriel Town is the headquarters of the shortest men in the Service, and as these signs are all full-length portraits, life-size,

and many of them equestrian, they appear in comparison to be Giants in regimentals. The prodigality of paint expended must be a standing, if not a lasting joy to the local colourmen.

The general effect of these sign-boards is that of a long military Portrait Gallery. The pictures are executed by the most eminently villainous of artists; but admission is free, and the gallery is open all the year round—one must not be too critical. Here is the “Young Rifleman,” in green uniform, green complexion, and green expression. The “Gay Gunner,” is endeavouring to thrust a sponge-probang down the throat of what appears to be the talking-seal; but, as no spot in the Zoological Gardens is recognisable in the back-ground, this point is open to discussion. The “Dashing Hussar” is evidently suffering (on horseback) from an acute attack of mumps, and is riding off with a mustard-plaster on his chest, while a bombshell playfully explodes in the corner. The “Lord Raglan” weeps into an empty

coat-sleeve pinned for the occasion to his nose. "The Sturdy Sapper" is a plagiarism—we know him well, and have seen him before at country fairs—but there he was the "Giant Drum-Major of Moscow." The "Raw Recruit" is undergoing repairs; but at present they have only proceeded as far as restoring the Recruit's trousers, and the higher aims of the artist are temporarily obscured.

Every sign appears to be a coloured delineation of one or more of the diseases to which military flesh is heir.

It is a kind of relief, this dreary day, looking up against this wall of woe, to see that "Blogg" is a Bootmaker, and "Jubbins," a Marine Store Dealer, and that having stated these facts in two colours only, they are content not to proceed to an exhibition in oils of every shade and hue, of their own especial maladies in the public Portrait Gallery of Tumbriel Town.

Does ever a bit of blue sky reflect itself in these long gutters? Does the mud always



cover the fetlocks of horses and the feet of foot-passengers? Truly, always—looking at these broad sheets of churning mud, over which a fleet of muddy bubbles slowly cruises to and fro. Is there no bottomless pit for these lagoons to drain into? See, one of these ponds has made an effort, and a long conduit of mud stretches away in the direction of those great grim gates which frown at the end of the street. Are these the great black floodgates of filth, these massive, mysteriously closed portals? They are opening. Is it that this sea of mud may escape through the gates into that green fog which hides one knows not what beyond?

Strange to say, the muddy stream which has come thus far, comes no farther, but here divides into two others, which run in opposite directions around the long dead walls, looming on either side the gateway. The threshold is a wonderful contrast to the dirt and darkness around it. The evenly-laid pavement is spotless, and its regularity and whiteness would almost lead one to

expect to find within, not an English, but a Dutch interior. At present, however, all that is to be seen inside is fog. A rumbling sound is heard, and from the mist looms a waggon, coming out through these grim portals. The great gates close-to again, while the lumbering waggon toils up the street, silently ploughing the mud as it goes.

That is a military-train waggon, and these are the great entrance-gates to the Tumbil Town Dockyard.

The slate-coloured, tunnel-roofed top of the waggon is streaked with lines of dirty, half-melted snow, which jolting off from time to time, present a very melancholy appearance. The little man, with the little whip, who rides the near-side of the two little shaggy horses, is a driver in the Army Service Corps—or as that body is called among the military, “Pickford’s Light Cavalry.”

People are standing about on the pavements; the hands of the men are, for the

most part, in their pockets—to-day, because it is cold and raw ; but in summer we have seen the same men, and still their fingers were in the same idle corners. The women appear more industrious, for, at least, they are gossiping together and catching cold in little groups of three and four at a time—but all are waiting—waiting for what ?

Sometimes, a broad red arm burrows from beneath a woman's shawl, and stretches out for a moment in the direction of the great gates. Sometimes, two or three of the women approach the edge of the kerb-stone, and forming up in line, lean over, looking eagerly down the street, at the imminent risk of a muddy immersion. A sepulchral bell beats out the hour—but it is the prelude to nothing, other than the sensation that loitering in Tumbril Town on such a day as this is very wretched work. Are they waiting for the wind ? or for a “good time that's coming ?” or for Fortune, disguised in some other prophetic guise ? or is the Government, alarmed at deeds across the seas,

going to take on extra dockyard labourers? Not to-day, certainly—not on this Christmas Eve—when even a First Lord is allowed to retire for awhile behind his baron of beef.

These men, moreover, are not, either physically or mentally, of the calibre of the Government dock-labourer; most of them are thin, half-starved idlers, who have no trade, and whose present occupation is to stand about all day. This they do excellently. Their hands are in their own pockets just now—but doubtless, if only for the sake of a love of change, many of those hands have at times sought solace for a brief period in the pockets of others. Their luck has run down with the Old Year, and many of them, alas! have lost the key, wherewith to wind it up and start anew in the sidereal future. A vulgar saying advises us “to wait till Christmas,” and this they appear very well content to do, especially as Christmas Day is only twelve hours off.

The crowd is slowly increasing; passers-by suddenly waver in their walk, then halt, and

ultimately fall victims to the flow of expectancy. The concourse, moreover, is changing its character, by an infusion of poor but more decently-clad folk, whose faces, even in the pestilential air, shew signs of a healthier habit of living. Immediately in front of the great gates the crowd has gathered in thicker numbers; it is a comfort to feel on this Christmas Eve, that the majority of these, though, may be, sitting "below the salt," are yet about to be, in some form or other, guests at the Ancient Feast.

Of course there is a contingent of boys—boys in every stage of existence, from the young and agile urchin, to the older lad who has learned the art of loafing from his seniors—one of whom, a greasy but obliging informant, appears at our side, and at once taking in the position, from the fact that our boots are sound, and that our clothes are not "slopped up," says, apologetically, "Beg pardon, sir, but p'r'aps yer'd like to know w'at th're a-waitin' for?" and continues, "There's four Batteries a comin' 'ome."

Everyone in the crowd is communicative—making statements, telling stories or starting rumours, all equally unreliable, but all rendered interesting from the alacrity with which they are immediately contradicted by fresh statements from apparently better informed loiterers.

Many of these people have more than a passing interest in watching the black portals, which remain so immutably closed. One man, in broad Northamptonshire dialect, is telling a little knot of listeners that he has “Cum for to meet a brother as I’ve got in the D Baatery, as I ar’n’t set eyes on not for this thurteen year, cum Oundle Hiring Fair.”

Around a half-embedded cannon, whose occupation now is the harmless one of standing erect to protect the kerb outside the gates, there is gathered a little group of women, whose heads are so very close together, that they might be obtaining “latest intelligence” from the mouth of the 64-pounder. For women in their class of life

they are unusually quiet and reserved in their speech ; and it is apparent, not so much from their clothes, as from the way in which they have put them on, that these women are not *habituées* of Tumbril Town.

It is an understood thing that the public is not admitted within the gates upon occasions such as these, and even "soldiers' friends" of the rank-and-file class are under this restriction also.

There is a rumour that the troop-ship is still lying out in the river, and, indeed, that she will not come up to the landing-stage till after to-morrow. "An' Chris'mas too; haint it a hinformous shame?" says a little busybody, who excitedly states that he "'as cum hall the way from the Boro'." A calmer, and altogether more sensible-looking individual, says that the troops were under orders to land at eight o'clock in the morning, and that probably the delay is owing to the difficulty in landing the horses. This remark falls with much more favour upon the crowd, which settles down again

and prepares to practice patience for an indefinite period.

The air is raw, and chills one to the very marrow. Now and again a hollow or husky cough makes a pathetic appeal—but slowly, surely, relentlessly, the cruel fog creeps over all.

It is bad enough to stand in this thawing vapour well shod—but for so many of these others! We are forcibly reminded of a noisy young *gamin* we once saw at a night school, who was making the rickety floor resound with his joyful clog-breakdown, as he shouted over and over again, “Oh, ain’t boots a blessin’? ain’t boots a blessin’?”

It is not surprising that from time to time our crowd is lessened by ones, and twos, and threes, who secede for awhile in the direction of the Portrait Gallery; but the majority, having taken up their position, keep it, and stand stolid as sentinels.

Our greasy informant has been holding a long argument concerning the Indian helmets and new facings worn by the crack regiment



which left the landing-stage a few months back. His chief occupation—next to that of contemplating with his hands in his pockets the Wheel of Fortune as it rolls through the mud of High Street Tumbril Town—is to “make oath, and say” to his fellow-creatures about him the things which are most reliable, the most truthful, and, therefore, the most worthy of deep attention. This he does by prefacing each of his instructive statements with a caution to his pupils to “make no mistake,” and finishing up with a warning that the ignorant and contradictory individual “musn’t make no error about it.”

The wicket-gate opens, and a policeman’s head and leg are protruded. This is the signal for a rush of some of the women upon the policeman rampant. The helmet shakes wisely to and fro, then bows to the regulation leg as it is hoisted in, and both disappear again behind the wicket, while an urchin who has found a perch on the 64-pounder, derisively shouts—

"Merry Chris'mas to you, Ole Know-nuthin'!"

The greasy informant, inferring somehow from our appearance that we have a thirst for knowledge, approximates himself towards us, and observes that, "The Batteries 'ave bin hout in the West Indies eleven years;" but adds that he has "'eared upon 'igh authority that they ain't a-going to disembark till Boxing Day;" also that "there ain't no 'orses landed yet." A man with the appearance of a dock-yard artisan challenges this statement, saying that the horses are all landed already, that the women and children are ashore, and that the Batteries have already formed up to march to barracks.

Our greasy informant turns defiantly round upon the bold mechanic and hastily using our boots for a rostrum, continues "to make oath," in diction, which if not legally valid, has a certain weight of its own, and makes itself felt upon the rumour-loving populace as well as upon our toes. Having in his own astute mind put to the rout the

wild theories of the mechanic, our greasy oracle turns once more to us, and, flushed with his victory, and somewhat husky from the foggy air in which it was won, at last condescends to ask, instead of to give information.

"Beg pardon, but yer ain't got the price of arf a pint about yer, 'ave yer?"

It is a matter for congratulation to the milder portion of the crowd that this question is so easily answered, for the greasy one betakes himself off to hold forth in the more enlightened atmosphere of the "Lord Raglan," and his voice is lifted up here no more.

"They calls 'im the open-hair preacher," the mechanic tells us; "'cos 'ees allus a 'old-ing forth and a-hargumenting, w'en 'ee gits the charnce to; an' w'en once 'ee begins, there's no putt'n of 'im down."

At this point we look round, and see that several soldiers, who have Christmas-leave of absence, are in the crowd: some of them expecting to see old comrades, and others

from that professional interest which makes omnibus-drivers, when they have a day off duty, generally spend it in riding up and down on the box-seat of a brother driver's 'bus.

It is dreary work, waiting round these silent gateways that are shut-to as if never more to open ; but the mechanic says, that "the band marched down to play 'em up to barracks, an hour ago or more."

This is hopeful ; they surely cannot be long in coming up now. It is to be hoped that the women and children are at least waiting in the sheds, ill-acclimatised as they must be to this new-old-world of fog and rain.

Something, and if tactile sense tells anything, something in shape like to a bird's beak, has been gently insinuating itself into our back from time to time. It is no bird's beak, however—it is the nose of a large earthenware jug, and the jug is full of beer.

The bearer is a servant-girl, unmistakeably Irish ; her face is seen at a glance to be the brightest and best-favoured one in the crowd,

but it will bear more than a glance, though it is not absolutely pretty. It has a certain stability which mere prettiness never gives. It is honest and wholesome, without being coarse. Wit hovers round the mouth, which, artistically considered, is its best feature. One feels that the wit, when on active service, will be well spoken, and will have no touch of lowness or vulgarity. Though her hair is a bright red—the more apparent in contradistinction to her white teeth—yet its unwonted neatness, and the absence of freckles upon her clear complexion, removes her at once from the imputation of belonging to that section of Kelts which we are wont to denominate “Wild Irish.” She may be about five-and-twenty—though she is probably older than one is at first sight inclined to take her for; but there is a certain innocence and artlessness of manner, which, sad to say, Tumbril Town cannot, as a rule, produce in her children after they have put away childish things.

She can hold her own, too, this robust

daughter of Erin with the beer jug. An admiring friend has been chaffing her with regard to an expectant mistress at home, who is waiting for her "physic."

"Faith, 'an the ould lady can wait for her physic a bit, bedad, when the bhoys are coming home. Sure an' the ould lady's waiting for an appetite."

The admiring friend has evidently known this witty bearer of the beer jug and her antecedents for some time; and subsequent scraps of their conversation let in a light on years of her history.

The friend tells Norah that she may have to wait much longer yet, and Norah, perturbed at this information, turns impetuously round upon us, but having discovered too late by our appearance that we are probably neither officially nor locally informed, yet modestly enquires:

"Is it throth, sor, that the coults are contrary?"

A soldier answers for us that "the men are under orders now, and will be up directly."

Norah remarks, drawing her shawl closer round her ;

“It’s moighty could ; all the turf in the Bog of Ballymore wouldn’t warm ye.”

At this juncture, the admiring friend requests that he may hold the jug, for fear lest Norah may, in her excitement, spill some of the precious contents. But Norah gets a closer grip round the handle, and shielding the bulging portion with her other hand, provokes much mirth by saying hurriedly—

“Ah ! that’s what ye’d be up to, would ye, ye spalpeen ? ye’d loike a good hould o’ the jug, bedad, an’ betwixt and betune there wudn’t be much left for the Misthris !”

Any joke about beer, however slender, always finds the most sympathetic appreciation in the British heart throughout the length and breadth of the land ; but in a garrison-town, any phase of the great Beer Joke is greeted with an alacrity hardly to be credited by him who has only witnessed its reception by the rustic agricultural or the

urban artisan. It is a tradition in a certain regiment that a friend of ours once laid odds of ten to one, that of the next eleven groups discovered laughing together, it should be found that the jokes *not* about beer would be inversely as the odds laid. He won the bet.

The distant bell tolls out the hour again, from its foggy heights, and Norah innocently inquires if she has been there more than five minutes.

That Norah is admired by the military portion of the crowd is evident; one or two of the soldiers have edged up to her—considering that demonstration is the better part of admiration; but beyond the fact that they belong to the “bhoys,” for whom Norah has already expressed her predilection, she certainly behaves towards them with strict, if not with Belgravian propriety.

Norah has stated openly that “she loikes the bhoys, for the sake of her broth of a bhoys that ’listed eight year ago.”

A Royal Artillery gunner, who by his



salutation seems to be acquainted with Norah, works his way up to her, and begins to talk : we cannot help overhearing parts of the conversation. Norah is complaining that he is "scant of news;" and is asking him if he has done his best for her, in trying to find out in what Battery a certain "Con" something, which we cannot hear, is now serving. The artilleryman explains that the corps is a very large one, that "Con" may have been drafted into a new Battery, that the Batteries are stationed all over the world and, lastly, that "Con" may not have enlisted in his true name.

Norah is still pressing him, and we overhear her say something about her having come "all the way from the ould counthry to Tumbril Town on purpose"—and then her head lowers over the beer jug, and something which we do not catch is said about "eight years;" but at this moment the sleepy gates open their heavy eyelids, and a couple of heavily-laden cabs emerge. On top they are crammed with huge travelling

trunks, and inside appear portions of ladies, maids, band-boxes, and babies.

In a moment, two more equally-laden cabs come through the gates, with more ladies, and a laugh is raised at one of the cabs by the peculiar appearance of a mulatto maid with a red bandanna, who puts her head out of the window, and chatters at the place where the sky ought to be.

A hurried glance is all the now eager and pressing crowd gets of the cabs as they drive on up the street. There is a little buzz of excitement, and then a sudden disappointment as the heavy doors close to again, and many mouths discontentedly utter, "Only Officers' ladies."

So there must be more waiting. To the chilly spectator who looks for nothing but a spectacle, it is a relief to find the fog lifting, and the early afternoon brightening somewhat—indeed, for a moment or two just now, a great round-ringed sun hung out his red signal of promise over the heights of the upper town—as if, after all, at this Vigil, this

watch-setting of the old Birthday, we are to hear the relief words, "All's well," ere he gives over to the night-guard the garrison of a sleeping world.

Norah cannot have observed the sun, or she surely would not now be bewailing her fate that caused her to be born under what she calls a "threepenny planet." She does not see him now, as he stalks from behind the clouds—perhaps he has dazed her with the omen that flashed from her beer jug—perhaps she is trying to read it. But the gates are opening again, and, as the crowd presses forward, more cabs, heavily-laden as before, pass out, and on up-street towards the barracks.

A mounted orderly rides down at a trot, and is admitted within the gates, which close behind him with military precision.

There is more time to look about one, and mark the signs of dissatisfaction among the waiting crowd. Norah has still a good grip on the beer-jug ; but further than this, its contents are no nearer her mistress's lips.

It is a marvel that the precious fluid has remained so long safe from the many attacks upon it; but Norah is a good girl, even if she possesses the vice of dawdling, and she has an eye—indeed at present we may say two eyes—upon the perilous jug.

A melancholic individual states that “they won’t be up for another two hours or more,” but is contradicted on the spot by sudden martial strains, which are heard coming up from the river; and the gates swing back once more. It is no false alarm this time, for they remain open, and two of the Dockyard Police come out to keep back the crowd.

The advancing sounds become suddenly louder with the deep boom of the big drum, and as the sun swings clear out of a sullen cloud, the joyful cadences range themselves into the tune of “*Dulce Domum.*”

It is with difficulty that the crowd is kept back; Norah, through either our politeness, or her own powers of progression—probably both—has steered her jug to the front, that

she may the better see the "bhoys march past."

The sound of the drum gets louder and backs up the merry trumpets; now the heavy booming begins to reverberate against the opposite houses. Windows awake and open into life; there is a running, and the outskirts of the crowd are rapidly filled, while the front rows close together; even the empty open aperture of the dockyard-gates, which an hour ago looked so impregnable, now appears to quiver with excitement; and at last the band begins to defile through. It is a Transformation Scene in real life, without the Pantomime.

The sun shines benignantly upon the uniforms, and the uniforms light up the street. The joyful music fills the air, but it has led the band on too fast. They halt and "mark time"—now they are off again. These are, so to speak, the residents of Tumbril Town, they are all well known by its inhabitants—but now for the visitors, the Christmas-guests! And now the query

*A Christmas Eve in Tumbrel Town. 237*

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runs round the crowd, "How will they look?" Then there is a little break, and with a jerk out rolls a heavy ambulance-waggon.

A dark man, with a face that a warmer sun than ours has warmed, sits in front, and offers a strange contrast to the pale complexion of the mounted driver; inside there appear the heads of two or three women. Then, as the waggon passes by, and its rear is presented to view, more women's heads; while two more dark men sit on the tail board, on guard, their legs swinging to and fro with military exactitude.

Then comes a covered ambulance-waggon with its awnings closed entirely, and a sympathetic bystander ejaculates, "They're for the 'orspital, poor devils."

Now come more waggons, their occupants mostly women and children, and all looking sea-sick and very yellow. And now there is a break in the waggons, and the van-baggage-escort marches past, and then come waggons filled with baggage. Next, a couple of

train-carts, containing baggage and boxes of every shape and size, and long trunks with hieroglyphics upon them, which might interest more than the casual observer.

Now the rear-escort is passing—composed chiefly of married men who have a more direct interest in the baggage, and whose wives and children are riding in the ambulances.

There are yet more women to come, and among them, here and there, a passing glimpse is obtained of a gunner who shares the straw with them, and whose face shows the weary convalescent-stage of fever and ague.

Many of the women appear so very cold, that even the refrain of "Home, sweet Home!" can hardly warm them.

As they go by, we can discern live pets enough to stock a menagerie—parrots and parrot-cages are freely distributed. One poor cockatoo has erected his tuft, and with open beak is raising his protest against all this journeying in cold weather. A parrot

looks in dire tribulation, as if he fears he may be about to moult at this untimely juncture, ill as he can afford to do so in such a chilly land.

Strange palms and tropical grasses are waved at us by little guinea-faced children. There are several monkeys; but some of the bronzed babies so closely resemble this interesting animal, that it is only on a second view that their zoological classification becomes certain; indeed, the easier way is to arrange the collection into babies that have, and babies that have not, red flannel jackets on.

Some of the younger women are smiling cheerfully through a veil of care; and one pretty young mother proudly holds up a fat, swaddled infant—the Pet of the Regiment—who is assiduously sucking the wooden shako of a wooden artilleryman.

But farther back in the recesses of the ambulance two ugly black hoods are dimly seen—and it is better to listen instead to the reassuring sounds of “Home, sweet Home!”



that fall gently and soothingly, now that the band has reached the top of the High Street, and is wheeling round to the left.

And now the invalids and the married portion have gone by, and with measured tramp the ranks come on.

Bronzed and bearded men, some sadly emaciated, others sturdy and strong, but all with a relieved expression upon their tropic-burned faces.

It is strange to see the eager "Eyes Right, Eyes Left," as each rank comes out of the gate—in spite of all military regulations—but discipline is relaxed somewhat on a day such as this; the kindlier officers see it also, and smile, while even the sterner disciplinarians do not give the order "Eyes Front." (Surely, if it be true, that Colonel Frederic Leighton, of the Artists' Volunteer Corps, once passed the word "Eyes Right, to look at the sunset," *these* men—though "Regulars,"—may have one glance at those who have watched and waited for them through so many weary years.)

Many of the men recognise old comrades or friends, and there are several little cries of recognition ; while, every minute or so, the crowd loses an unit, who "falls in," and marches on beside the new-found one. One well-built fellow greets a grey-headed old man, who, in his anxiety to get out of the crowd, nearly leaves his coat-tails behind him ; but the greeting from an old friend who does not stand so high as the old man by three feet, is greater—as a shaggy colley-dog, standing up on hind legs, makes desperate efforts to "fall in," and failing this does his best to drag the smart soldier out of the ranks altogether.

The men are marching four deep, but in very open order, for most of them carry some trophy or other. Bundles of walking-sticks, strangely carved, and of foreign wood, appear to be universal selections among the men.

And now the rear-guard comes by ; they march as men who are marching home—they have marched, they have counter-

marched, they have toiled, and gone on guard, and done fatigue-duty under a tropic sun, for years, away from friends, away from the Old Country; and now they are back for Home Service and a little rest.

They have done their duty, and they return, though in a time of peace, looking like heroes. There is many a handsome face, strong and manly and daring, yet kind and good—their long beards give even the younger men a patriarchal look.

The last ranks are defiling past; when suddenly there is a quick cry in front, and, amid some commotion, Norah violently breaks her way through, at imminent jeopardy to the beer jug.

She makes toward a handsome Sergeant who is carrying a goat across his broad shoulders. "Faith, it's Con—it's Con Ryan—it is, it is!" and that worthy suddenly swings round the astonished goat into his comrade's shako. In a moment they are together; and so Norah also, despite her

“threepenny planet,” has fallen in with the regiment.

There is some stir in the crowd, used as it is to scenes like this; we too are guilty of the unseemly act of pushing forward, and looking over the heaving heads of the people—the last we see, against the background of a large setting sun, is Con Ryan gripping the goat with one hand, while he raises Norah’s jug to his lips with the other, and drinks to the girl he left behind him.

## XI.

## OPEN AIR IN TOWN.

IT is always a pleasure, after being pent up for hours at any occupation (however interesting it may be) to move along for a while in the open-air—even though the “open air” be only that so-called, which greets us as we step forth from our little working-cell into one of the many murky corridors of a great city. Air, that has been tamed since it hurried along over miles of wold and moor, less pure now than when it loitered among fields and farm-lands; uncharged now with the sweet odours which it stored up as it slept in the fir-plantation, or by the river osier-bed, or in some cottar’s garden upon a patchwork counterpane, fragrant with many a sweet-smelling violet, and carnation, and

daffodilly—still even if it be our lot to partake of the “open air” only when, less sweet and more murky, it has come to town, it is yet reviving, for there is motion, and therefore there is life.

But there is another pleasure in being (as we chilly Englishmen are wont to put it) “out of doors”—more especially to those to whom “open air” chiefly means exercise within the prison-barriers of a large town—in the delight of watching the many small traits of humanity in the various expressions and actions of those, who, as they pass, ever present to him who cares to look, some fresh colour, some new form, in the changeful kaleidoscope of Nature. Here is an assembly to which we can all have the *entrée*, at any hour of noon or night, no cards or credentials to be left beforehand ; and, though here are all sorts and conditions of men, yet is each upon a level with each, as the paving-stones underfoot. At this great assembly we may stay or retire, as we will—there is no hostess to be bored or appeased. Time may press,

and a hasty glance may be all we ever have, as face follows face—a hasty glance, only sufficing to shew us the title of one of the many chapters in a life-history, as the wind of Circumstance blows to and fro the open pages of the soul. A moment's glance—yet even this, if we have the clairvoyance of sympathy, may teach us some new lesson in the art of unravelling the tangled skein of existence.

There are those who hold that quick perception is but another name for premature, and often erroneous conclusion. This keen vision, keener far than the single-sight with which the good sportsman drops his birds, is not granted to all of us alike. This is vision more true, more piercing than ever vulture of the Andes possessed—watching and peering from cold high peak, to strike through thin air, down, down, into the far-off, silent world below—more true, for *this* vision is the all-divine sympathy, which brings the far-off near, and makes the near clear and distinct.

Without some of this quick-witted sympathy, our eyes are useless ; and indeed, if we have it not, we had almost better not use them, for we shall find that they mostly lead us astray—we shall run against people, we shall be jostled and complaining ; we shall be told that we have kept the wrong side. In such a case it were better, shutting our eyes on our own blindness, to trust to our instincts to lead us, and to walk as blind men to our journey's end, holding out our hands for the mercy of the passers by. It is for this reason that we are sorry for near-sighted persons—they so often prove near-souled too !

Sometimes (and too often), the pleasures which the peripatetic in soul and mind enjoys will be overcast with interest of the saddest sort. Sights will meet him which may painfully shake his faith. But then is the time for him to remember that *his* observations must be taken from the wider and unrestrained ranges of the true philanthropist, not from the confined and narrow police-



man's beat of the bigot. Believing that there *is* an ultimate good somewhere, he will take heart, and consider that, if there is, and naturally must be, evil, so also must there be a remedy to be found, difficult in the discovery, and gradual in its efficacy, but nevertheless not undiscoverable and mythical as the Philosopher's Stone of the Cynics.

Let us consider, and console ourselves, when we weep despondingly over the apparent cruelty of the economy of Nature; and if, as we turn appealingly to heaven, there drive across the windy wolds of this world only the were-wolf howl of Fate in answer, let us then, listening rather to our own hearts (of which reason is, after all, the mere mirage) wait and trust, and we shall hear, between the cruel staves, in sweet and inspiring undertone, far-off notes of help from a Fate more great than Fate, though long delayed.

It is little, indeed, that the wisest of us will ever know here of this, the greatest of all studies—the study of our fellow-creatures ;

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greatest, because it is that for the sake of which all other studies exist. All other studies, however interesting they may be in themselves, are but the more or less mechanical and clumsy contrivances, whereby we aid our eyes to gaze on the Play of Life. Yet, when we think what it would mean to know and rightly understand that part of God's nature, which we call human, we ought not to be discouraged at our present small results, but should rather rejoice at the thought of the infinity of pleasure and power, which must come one day in greater measure to those who desire to apply the knowledge they have gained in the routine of the schools of this world. Pleasure, because, we shall then see, beneath all the sins, weaknesses and meannesses, which once made us despair, an ultimate truth and goodness which nothing could destroy, and which will at last redeem all the ignoble acts of that creature, made after God's own image, but often how sadly maimed and marred ! Power—because we shall be more

able to comprehend motives otherwise inexplicable, and thus to love, and thence to aid, and perhaps to turn back descending souls into the ascending scale of life.

## XII.

## THE UNBIDDEN GUEST.

Who is he—this “most potent, grave, and reverend Seignor?” All to-day have the folks in our little village been talking about him. He rode in this morning on top of the coach. Grimby the Guard was blowing his horn. Our church-bells were telling the Rectory rooks—for everyone else already knew—of the wedding of our young squire.

The coach pulled up suddenly, opposite Dame Tobert’s roses, that seemed this morning as if they too, by craning their long green necks would get one peep at the gentle bride. A crowd of excited villagers ran up and surrounded the coach.

The insides looked out, and the outsides looked down; a cloud of July dust rose up

behind the rumble. They looked—but *he* was gone. No one saw him go—for as Dame Tobert said, “It war all done in a wink.” Versions varied as to his guise. He had been seen upon the box, in the rumble, in the road; only one thing was certain—he was not to be seen now. Strange, but I had seen him—that is, his back—but yesterday, a hundred miles away, as I was hurrying to catch the last train which could bring me—the last guest—to the wedding. The villagers stared and wondered, the guests at the Great House wondered. All discussed the event; but to-night, now that a sun has gone down, and quiet stars look into nests of sleeping rooks, the riddle is still unsolved. “Who is he? What was he like? Did no one see his face?” Yes; *one* did, but he will not tell—and nobody has even asked him.

Do not think, O thoughtful reader, that the village is the most ignorant one in the kingdom: it is singularly enlightened. It has a school, not a dame’s school—for ten years ago Dame Tobert was told that she was

getting too feeble to undertake the morals of some thirty growing infants. Now, there is a school-house, with a big bell, and fixed forms for those who one time carried their own stools to and fro. The church has been restored, and though his bones are venerable and aged, his skin is as fresh as the newest born church in the country. Nor is the village parson one who hides his light under a sleepy exterior and a dismal Geneva cloak.

“He’s a man that can think as well as his bishop, and a deal better, too,” says the new organist. The parson is not the one enlightened “person” of the village that once he was; there is a doctor, who sees in every patient a certain scientific end. “Heads or heels, sir, every patient has a certain scientific end,” says this Scientific Means. And even he is not the end of thought in the village; for within the parish bounds live two philosophers—an inventor (this term is vague), and an orator—a Labourers’ Union agent. Surely, dear reader, this is

not a backward village; yet to-night no one in it has solved the question of to-day, no one is nearer solving it than those who solemnly discussed the same mystery yesterday, a hundred miles away.

If the face is the alphabet of identity, then is the reason plain why he has been so untrustworthily described. Yesterday, like a will-o'-the-wisp, he vanished—the men of yesterday fared no better than those of to-day. To-night I recall times when I myself—I must not say have *seen* him, but have been near him; have—ah! how many years ago now—touched him. Yet now, grown older, and travelled near enough to cast a long shadow into my grave, I wonder that I have not wondered more, at the many times I have met him, stood by him, passed him—and yet have never caught a glimpse of his face. Once, I was looking up where the ragged edge of a beetling cliff cut the sky: a sea-gull screamed and called to me, and looking up, I saw a man who rose up from the rugged edge. At a glance, I had

recognised him—but there was a second figure behind him—a figure which seemed stronger, and yet less clearly-defined. It was *he*. It was a chance—but I looked away.

How widely known, yet how little known he is. Few that I have met but have had one fleeting glance at his hurrying figure. Surely, the Wandering Jew was never more ubiquitous; he is here; he is there.

Why should his coming and going be always shrouded in mystery? How much men talk of him! How little they know him! If any have looked him full in the face, then indeed has he pledged them with his masonic secret—for they never tell. Bold men have tried to portray him. I have seen his portrait a score of times, but not one of them is like another. His name is always given in full; but were ever so many different portraits painted of the same original? All so different, and all apparently failing in being a likeness. He must have been a restless sitter. Poor Nutterboom, painter and mystic, once said to me, "These men



have never even seen his face! bah! it is a make-up portrait, it is fancy—they have never found the right model. Ah! but good brother, I go to Rome this month. He is often there, in *propria persona*, as we say. He will visit the galleries in the winter. I will await him, he shall not escape me. One fair look at him and I have him in my”—coffin, I muttered, as I read the death of my young Flemish friend, in the “*Voce della Verità*,” that same sad month.

One afternoon, the quarter-bells were chiming their song to awaken the bigger Ben, as he hung drowsily after his hourly sleep, in the high Clock-Tower of S. Stephen's; below, a little crowd had collected. I pushed in, and asked what drew them there at that hour. It was Wednesday—an afternoon-sitting. Accounts varied, but I found that some great Personage had unexpectedly come down to the House—and I discovered that it was *he*. No one had seen him arrive—but he was inside now, and policemen, running here and there,

confirmed the report that it was an unusual event for *this* Personage to make a visit there. He has no seat in either House by virtue of his prerogative ; but whenever he does come, there is always one ready to be given up to him. And he was inside now—Where was he taking up his position ? On a Ministerial or an Opposition bench ? He is reported to be the oldest Conservative extant.

Waiting is always weary work ; at last a carriage slowly drove up and stopped. The crowd divided ; he was coming out at last ! But at that very moment a man with brawny shoulders and a tall hat which he kept upon his head, swayed and struggled right in front of me. Some one got into the carriage ; it drove away. I had had *one* more chance—but the blinds were drawn down—I had seen nothing.

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THE END.

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